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STYLIANOS TROULLAKIS

**QUEER-IES
IN RITUAL:**

**A STUDY OF
QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES
IN EMERGENCE**



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QUEER-IES IN RITUAL:

**A STUDY OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES
IN EMERGENCE**

STYLIANOS TROULLAKIS
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Stylianos (Stelios) Troullakis to Master Performance Practices, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in Performance Practices, 2022.

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PRACTICES**

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SYNOPSIS

QUEER-IES IN RITUAL: A STUDY OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES IN EMERGENCE is an ongoing artist research project interested in exploring queer subjectivities as they emerge outside of subjugation - or when they are not perceived as "Other." The research focuses on how a ritualistic performance setting may facilitate intra-actions between queer bodies, and documents the subjectivities arising from said intra-actions. For this purpose, a combination of critical queer and gender theories are employed, alongside concepts and discourses taken from feminist new materialism and Performance Studies.

This research stems from a personal, ongoing quest for identity in this complex political landscape, with increasing public demonstrations of queerphobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, war, and a neoliberal capitalist society that either turns a blind eye or exploits and profits from the daily struggles of people. It is inspired by the transformation I have realized in myself, facilitated by every new queer acquaintance that has entered my life and the acknowledgement of the ways we learn, grow and reshape our viewpoints together; the power acceptance, love, and belonging carry.

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To the rest of the students of HoPP, who have taught me more with their friendship and practices in the last two years than books and readings did.

To the regular and visiting lecturers at HoPP for the education they provided me with in the last two years.

DECLARATION

I, Stylianos Troullakis, hereby certify that I had personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, QUEER-IES IN RITUAL: A STUDY OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES IN EMERGENCE.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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INTRODUCTION

*"...therefore we are all non-binary. There are no non-binaries."
Evan Fusco "We Each Go Through So Many Bodies in Each Other"*

Even past the point of the first two decades of the 21st century, claiming and owning a queer identity can be particularly challenging. Moving from Greece, a relatively conservative country, to the Netherlands, a country that has been an example of acceptance, progress and diversity in queer issues for decades, gave me the opportunity to explore and experiment with my queerness far more than I have done before. Part of this self-exploration and reinvention has allowed me to further embrace the queerness of my gender identity and claim the term "non-binary" to describe it.

Non-binary is an umbrella term that describes a vast spectrum of gender identities that do not fit within the gender binary (the binary of man/woman). Some other terms that fulfill a similar function but can have varying nuances according to context, or different significance to the self-defining subject, are "gender non-conforming," "genderqueer," and "gender fluid." For the purpose of efficiency in this paper, I will mainly be using the term "non-binary" as an all-encompassing term in discussing all these identities. I would therefore like to acknowledge at this point that addressing someone with their preferred terminology constitutes a significant act of

respect and acknowledgment of queer people and their sense of identity.

Even though the term “non-binary” has now become more present in popular discourse and everyday language, it is often regarded as a “third gender”¹ rather than an umbrella term, or is often disregarded as merely “that which does not fall within the gender binary.” By merely viewing it as “Other” two main issues arise: a) gender queerness is defined – and thus validated – only in relation to normativity and can therefore not escape the restraints of the very discourse it tries to elude, and b) by regarding gender queerness as non-normative, therefore as something that by definition it is not, its potentialities remain unacknowledged.

If one subscribes to Muñoz’s idea that “queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (2009, 1), it becomes easy to deduct that gender queerness is not a ‘being’ but a ‘becoming,’ a perpetual negation of gender as both a discursive and an embodied experience that constantly opens up the possibilities of what its future could be. It is the promise of these potentialities, these possibilities of discovering new ways of visualizing a future ‘being’ that inspired this research.

¹ Evan Fusco explains in “We Each Go Through So Many Bodies in Each Other” that “mainstream nonbinary is based on stability and an established androgyny, often skinny, white, and slightly feminine” (2021, 167)

This research was constructed around a rather simple and straightforward premise: by studying queer subjectivities in relation to other queer subjectivities, instead of ‘normative’ ones, we can move beyond the characterization of ‘Otherness’ that seems to be haunting queerness and expand it from within. I would argue therefore that this research is not as much concerned with the proving – or disproving – of a hypothesis, but rather with the facilitation and expansion of queer subjectivities and potentialities, beyond the rigid, fixed understanding of what they are.

There is an added sense of urgency stemming from the realization of the way binary distinctions have dominated Western discourse and therefore our perceptions. Binaries such as good/bad, masculine/feminine, and I (or We)/You have shaped our society and understanding of the world to such a degree, that it becomes difficult to envision an alternative. And that is precisely where I believe the importance of this research lies. Because one can locate embodied examples of experiences outside of a binary in the lived experience of non-binary individuals. And by drawing on such experiences, one can begin to reimagine ways of rearticulating or re-viewing the world around us. It, then, becomes central to the research to understand – or try to – the notion of non-binarism as it is understood in the context of gender – so as something that is neither and both masculine and feminine, something that

exist in-between and beyond – and use it as a lens to critically reflect throughout the process on issues beyond gender.

For this reason, this research is not only interested in non-binarism as an object of study, but it also attempts to utilize it as an approach in understanding the elements around which it is conceptualized, structured, conducted, and articulated. In an attempt to avoid binary dichotomies, practice and theory have not been dealt with as two separate entities, but rather two overlapping and mutually informing sides of the same coin. Consequently, this research has been taking place simultaneously in two modalities – a studio practice and a reading practice – which have been in constant conversation. As much as the studio practice is being informed and shaped by the theoretical backdrop provided by the reading practice, the reading practice is understood, questioned and brought further forward by the practical work. Or, as this process would be understood in new materialist terminology – which will be discussed further in Chapter 1, they are read diffractively, through one another.

The research is disseminated in three main creative outcomes: a public performance, which is viewed as a public sharing of the studio practice, and hence an extension of it; a portfolio in the form of a zine that will include a series of interviews with the participants of the research as well as reflections from the studio practice; finally this written thesis which attempts

to contextualize the work within both an academic and an artistic framework – or, hopefully, a framework that positions itself between and beyond the binary of academia/artistic world .

This thesis is divided in three chapters, named after the three stages of the rite of passage, as defined by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in his work *The Rites of Passage* (1909), as the three stages appear to be poetically representing the content of the three chapters. In the first chapter, “Separation,” which signifies the departure from a current state of being, I offer a theoretical contextualization of the research, discussing theories of gender performativity and proposing a critical reworking of them according to a new materialist theory of performativity put forth by Karen Barad. The second chapter, “Liminality/Margin,” explains the different methodologies employed and describes the studio practice I engaged with, alongside other participants, to test in practice the potential of such a reworking of queer theory, and document the queer subjectivities that emerged in the process. Finally, the third chapter, “Aggregation,” explains the dissemination of the research, focusing on the performance/experiment “Can’t Explain Why it Relates to Gender,” which was presented in May 2022, as my final performance in the context of my master’s studies. In closing, a conclusion with important notes that arose from the experiments and future directions this research could take.

CHAPTER 1 : SEPARATION

*"Becoming-nonbinary contains within it a promise of a denial of identity's power to properly contain one's essence and to truly categorize and systematize those who exist within it."
Evan Fusco "We Each Go Through So Many Bodies in Each Other"*

GENDER, PERFORMATIVITY AND SUBJUGATION

The notion of the "performative" can be traced back to the concept of "performative utterance" which was introduced by J.L. Austin in his speech act theory. These are words or sentences that when spoken, not only describe but create their realities - from God's "let there be light," to the priest's "I now pronounce you husband and wife" (Austin, 1955). Judith Butler, in her seminal 1990 book *Gender Trouble* picked up on this idea of the performative and developed her radical theory of "gender performativity." In Butler's view, gender - with gender being used in the sense of two distinct genders upholding the gender binary - is performative insofar as it is not a "being" but a "doing." She characteristically argues that:

"gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, 45)

In other words, the very act of assigning a gender is a performative utterance through which by naming someone a gender, they become it. But, it is not only the naming that ensures the sanctity and validity of the assigned gender, but also the constant performance of the gender according to the

standards and limits set within the project of heteronormativity. To allude to Simone de Beauvoir's iconic phrase, one becomes a woman because one is told that they are, but in order to maintain that very womanhood that was assigned to them without an ounce of a choice, one needs to act - or perform - in the way a woman is expected to act. The same model equally applies to manhood.

Drawing from Foucault's understanding of the relations of power, Butler also argues that subjects are recognized as such only when they are gendered "intelligibly"; when they conform to the recognizable standards of gender intelligibility set by cisgender, heterosexual discourse - or what she calls the "heterosexual matrix" (Butler, 1990; Finlay 2017). There is therefore, a certain element of citationality in the formation of the gendered subject, as it can only be recognized as such within the constraints of the heterosexual matrix only as far as it corresponds to previously set performances of gender. In her later work, *Bodies that Matter*, she suggests that "performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constraint repetition of the norms" (Butler, 1993, 60), staying in line with Foucault's premise that the subject is formed through subjugation to existing, established discourse.

As discussed already, the formation of the cisgender, heterosexual subject through subjugation to the laws of the heterosexual matrix follows a simple model. Two diametrically opposite genders,

responding to two diametrically opposite sexes, exist with distinct characteristics and are to be attracted to each other and procreate. Butler further analyses these ideas, centering (heterosexual) desire as the epicenter of the formation of this model, but exploring those ideas further would go beyond the scope of this research. The heteronormative subjects, therefore, are identified as subjects because their subjectivity is legible and recognizable within this model of gender binarism.

The dynamics of the model become a bit more complex as far as the formation of the queer subject is concerned. Firstly, the semantic meaning of the word "queer," which signifies that which is "abnormal" or "weird," needs to be taken into account. The queer subject is that whose subjectivity fails to fit in - or transgresses - the model of irritability put forth in the service of perpetuation of the heterosexual matrix, and is subsequently viewed as "weird." Again, Butler discusses the subversive/transgressive power of homosexual desire and homosexual body acts - such as a male person, who would be recognized as a man in the canon of heteronormative discourse, performing fellatio or receiving anal pleasure. There is an aspect of irritability - or rather dis-irritability - in this understanding of the queer subject, as the one who fails to conform to the heteronormative reading of subjectivity. In that way, the queer subject is marked as "Other" and remains understood through its oppositional standpoint towards

the discourse of normativity. In Butler's words, "the public assertion of 'queerness' enacts performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy" (Butler, 1993, xxviii).

The main issue that arises with such a construction of queerness, one that Butler understands as well, is that the very existence of queer subjectivity is incapable of subverting the heteronormative sociopolitical structures that are in place, as queerness essentially becomes the exception that reaffirms the rule.

A QUEER-POSITIVE TURN ON PERFORMATIVITY

Judith Butler's reading of the formation of the gendered subject has been as celebrated within queer and academic circles, as it has been critiqued. One common critique that it has received is that it fails to recognize any agency on the part of the queer subject. Toby Finlay, on their article "Non-Binary Performativity: A Trans-Positive Account of Judith Butler's Queer Theory" offers a reading of Butler's theories that "identifies and creates space for subversive and non-conforming gender performativities" (Finlay, 2017, 60). They begin by discussing the power relations that form and uphold the heterosexual matrix, highlight the interdependency of normative and queer subjectivities through the identity affirmation they find in their reciprocal mis-recognition,

and they call attention to violence of interpellation² "that subjectivizes individuals and indoctrinates them into the norms and power relations of the heterosexual matrix" (Finlay, 2017, 63). Most importantly, they bring attention to an often omitted part of Butler's theories, and that is the idea that discourse cannot fully constitute a subject and thus agency is located within the subject through this impossibility of external constitution (Finlay, 2017, 62). I connect this idea with Karen Barad's critique on Butler's inability to recognize the importance of materiality in the formation of subjectivities, which will be further discussed later in the chapter. Finlay's closing argument, which becomes the starting point of my own research, draws from Paisley Currah's and Dean Spade's transgender scholarship, bringing attention to the need of reclaiming the academic scholarship around queerness, thus attempting to break the cycle of perpetuation of the mechanisms that uphold the heterosexual matrix, and to, therefore, offer trans and non-binary people the space to assert our own gender identities (Finley, 2017, 67).

The way that I understand and share this position, would prescribe that scholarship and discourse move beyond the point of seeing the "Other" in queer subjectivities and

² "Althusser's term to describe a mechanism whereby the human subject is 'constituted' (constructed) by pre-given structures (a structuralist stance). By being named or 'hailed' as a member of a group, a person is led to see themselves as an ideological subject" (from Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100008265>)

unpack queerness beyond its minoritarian status. Historically, as queer people have managed to create our own circles and develop our own cultures, parts of which are slowly being commodified and accumulated into mainstream culture, it is now more important than ever to understand the mechanisms and dynamics that have been and are at place within these cultures, what needs they cover, and what alternatives to normativity they have been offering. I then propose a relationship of disidentification with the very notion of queerness, or rather the element of "Otherness" located in the very categorization of something as queer.

I understand the term "disidentification" as proposed by Jose Esteban Muñoz in his book "Disidentifications," in which he draws from French linguist's Michel Pêcheux's description of the "three modes in which a subject is constructed by ideological practices"(Muñoz, 1999, 11). The first one being "identification," or being complicit with said practices, or normative within queer discourse; the second, "counteridentification" or resisting/going against them, or being queer; and lastly, "disidentification." As Muñoz explains:

"disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (Muñoz, 1999, 11-12).

Thus, this proposed understanding of queerness as a practice or modality of disidentification embraces and understands its external situation in relationship to the heterosexual matrix, but does not merely rest on this idea of being a counter-normative practice. The idea of a counter-practice, or a counter-"being" is essential in defining and locating queerness within the wider picture of normatively-dominated social structures and discourses, as Butler has showcased. However, it is important to think and see beyond such definitions, to avoid perpetuating a discourse in which the queer subject is viewed only as a subjugated, minoritarian one. I propose a non-binary model of reading the power dynamics which upkeep dominant discourse, and one that does not view normativity and queerness as two opposing ends of a binary, but as a binary model which once understood can be "thought-through" and thus becomes a foundation for explorations of potentialities that exist in-between and beyond. Because within the widely and abstractly defined concept of queerness, there are patterns and relations that could be argued as normative (or commonly repeated) within queer cultures.

Of course, such an approach in queer academia is not an innovative one, as there is already a plethora of scholars, some of which have greatly influenced my views, writing from such a perspective, like Sara Ahmed, Jose Esteban Muñoz and Jack Halberstam, to name a few. What my analysis and research

are attempting to offer, however, is a critical reworking of Butler's theory of gender performativity through such a non-binary lens of disidentification. The proposed way of doing so, would employ the understanding of performativity established by Karen Barad's new materialist views, expressed thoroughly and compactly in their 2003 essay "Posthumanist Performativity".

NEW MATERIALIST PERFORMATIVITY AND A REWORKING OF GENDER

In the essay named "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," Karen Barad attempts to reformulate our entire way of understanding the world we are a part of, drawing from social theory - such as Foucault and Butler - to physics - and most significantly Nils Bohr's atomic model which revolutionized science's perception of the world almost a century ago. In it, Barad employs Joseph Rouse's theories to identify Representationalism as a bi-product of Cartesian dualism - the infamous mind/body split - and the core of the issue of how we understand "reality". Since Representationalism establishes human perception as merely a perception of representations of things and not the things themselves, it creates the philosophical questioning of what "the real" actually is and whether we can even perceive it. Moreover, this problem presents itself around the idea of the "knowing subject", where the "internal" and the "external" (in dualist - or binary - perception) meet. The

"knowing subject" tends to believe that they have a better understanding of the meaning of their thoughts and linguistic articulations rather than the things they speak of. They then propose a performative understanding of the world as an alternative view that helps "shift the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality to matters of practices/ doings/ actions" (Barad, 2003, 802).

They proceed to acknowledge the importance and limitations of Foucault's argument that discursive practices shape the materiality of the body, and therefore the limitations of Butler's performative elaboration of that theory as well, as in both cases it is never disclosed "how discursive practices produce material bodies" (Barad, 2003, 808). Citing Rosemary Hennessey's critique of Foucault, they maintain a need to understand how bodies are shaped by discursive and non-discursive practices alike, in different social contexts. They introduce the theory of "agential realism" to provide for such an account, according to which the universe is not comprised of objects, but phenomena, thus making a shift from a classical ontological³ understanding of entities (human and non-humans alike) as "that which they are" to one that centers the inseparability of their agencies and perceives them as "that which they are when perceived in intra-action"⁴ with

³ a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being (Merriam-Webster online dictionary)

⁴ "Intra-action is a Baradian term used to replace 'interaction,' which necessitates pre-

something else"; what they call a "relational ontology". These phenomena are understood as material-discursive, as they are formed from the constant intra-actions of materiality and discourse. In other words, it is its 'doings' that makes an object and defines its objecthood, within a specific context or discourse. According to Barad, when different phenomena are engaged in specific agential intra-actions, an agential cut is enacted which effects a separation between 'subject' and 'object' (Barad, 2003, 815). It is, therefore, through the enactment of the agential cut that a formation of subjectivity arises, within these premises. In their conclusion, they redefine performativity not as iterative citationality, as Butler argued, but instead iterative intra-activity.

It then becomes significant to understand how the gendered subject comes to be recognized and constituted within such a view. If gender as a concept can be understood as socially constructed, we can perceive it, within the norms of the gender binary, as part of a discursive practice, which is normatively upholding the model of the heterosexual matrix. In that case, the gendered subject is a discursive-material phenomenon, whose subjectivity is understood anew and reiterated through every intra-action the subject/phenomenon is a part

established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces (Barad, 2007, 141) in which all designated 'things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably" (Stark, 2016).

of. If one is then to abide by the norms of heteronormativity, every gendered subjectivity arising from any intra-action needs to be in accordance with these norms. It becomes a statistical impossibility that this will be the case, and therefore one could argue that any human entity is fundamentally (or potentially) queer, as the multitude of subjectivities that form them cannot be normative.

Similarly, looking at the queer subject through that same understanding of performativity, one can locate the same statistical impossibility of perpetually eluding any sense of subjectivity that could be characterized as "normative". It then becomes apparent that a binary understanding of normativity and queerness, one that holds strong and absolute distinctions between the two, is a reductive model of understanding the world. This is why I maintain that a relationship of Disidentification needs to be developed with the concepts of queerness and normativity. A relationship that allows us to navigate the world through the terminology readily available to us, but also facilitates the identification of the danger in such an absolute and binary discourse, makes it possible to subvert said discourse from within.

As far as non-binary gender identities are concerned, one could argue that they are essentially existing proof of the functionality and possibility of such a new materialist perspective of performativity, and the relevance of such

perspective to the understanding of the gendered subject. A potential reading of these identities through the lens offered by Barad would understand the non-binary existence as one that is aware of the multitude of different locals their constant emerging subjectivities would occupy within the model the gender binary is proposing. Essentially, if we are to assume that within a gendered understanding of our world, most of our actions/doings are also performative expressions of our gendered selves, then these actions and the ways they've been performed have a place within our conventional, binary, and normative distinctions of masculinity and femininity. Whereas the idea that masculinity and femininity are found in any human subject and it's the difference of quantities that distinguishes the female and the male is often encountered even within heteronormative discourses, it still exists to assert the validity of binary gender identities. In the case of non-binary identities, however, the grouping of all the different subjectivities does not amount to a greater, coherent gender identity, but rather recognizes and finds solace in the fluidity of identification within the complex landscape of gendered identities.

APPARATUSES AS AGENTS OF INTRA-ACTION AND PERFORMANCE AS AN APPARATUS

The last significant concept that needs to be understood within the context of this research is the concept of the "apparatus," as introduced and explained by Barad. The

concept was discussed already in the essay "Posthumanist Performativity" and was re-introduced and elaborated on further in their later work. It constitutes a central point of new materialism as it brings together questions of materialization and distribution of agency (nikolić, 2018).

The concept of the apparatus was first introduced by Foucault "to indicate the processual and physical nature of the organization of power" (nikolić, 2018), but was taken up by Barad and reformulated on a Posthumanist account. They define apparatuses in "Posthumanist Performativity" as "not mere arrangements in the world, but rather dynamic (re) configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted (2003, 816). They also highlight that as practices, they are open-ended. Arguably, apparatuses can then be view as systems or constellations of phenomena and their relations, specific material-discursive practices that are in constant intra-action with other apparatuses.

The notion of a "system" may be beneficial in understanding the nature of an apparatus, as it reflects a formation or phenomenon familiar to us through the language of physics. This system would include a selection of material arrangements along with specific discursive practices which intra-act, generating and altering meaning through one another. It remains open-ended however, as it, itself, continuously intra-

acts with other systems/apparatuses/configurations around it, and is therefore susceptible to changes in its discursive-material configurations. So, its very being, its very ontology, remains relational and fluid.

And it is precisely at this point where I believe a turn towards performance practices is necessary. Performance practices can be understood, even outside of new materialist discourse, as a constant negation between discursive and material practices, a space where materiality, the body, is centered as the locale where meaning is generated, and also applied. In performance, artists engage in contextualized actions in a specific location imbued with geopolitical and temporal discursive-material phenomena, thus positioning themselves as a discursive-material phenomenon in intra-action with their chosen or orchestrated surroundings. Performance can then be seen as an apparatus inviting a “dynamic (re)configuring of the world,” which makes it an ideal tool in researching the potentialities arising from a new materialist turn in queer discourse.

CHAPTER 2: LIMINALITY/MARGIN

*“Becoming-nonbinary is entropic, process-based, never still, always shifting. It is both something and nothings, it is and it is not an identity. It’s kind of.”
Evan Fusco “We Each Go Through So Many Bodies in Each Other”*

It becomes important at this stage, after establishing the theoretical landscape that this research draws from, to re-articulate the question that has propelled it forward. In concluding the first chapter, I theorized that non-binary gender identities can be understood in a more nuanced and complex way through Barad’s new materialist reworking of performativity. I propose, then, a performance-based process as a medium - or apparatus - that could facilitate the testing of that theory through “doings,” and maintain that by following such a process and documenting the emerging subjectivities that come from the scored intra-actions, we can generate knowledge about the complexities of embodied experiences of gender.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL

Ritual has been a central concept within this research for a multitude of reasons, which need to be made clear in order to understand how this process-based exploration has functioned. Most importantly, the concept of ritual emerges from an understanding of my own practice and the way it has been shaped by my formal artistic training. As I come from a background that is mostly theatrical, with a strong emphasis

on more physical and less representational approaches to theatre, my practice has been greatly influenced by the theories and methodologies of Antonin Artaud and, one of his successors, Jerzy Grotowski. Through their revolutionary approaches, found in the books "The Theatre and Its Double" and "Towards a Poor Theatre" respectively, they affected a shift in our modern understanding of theatre that puts embodied, personal experience at its center and moves away from classical, representational approaches, which tend to focus more on text and narrative. In addition, their understanding of theatre has led them to descriptions and performances that would resonate closer with what we now characterize as "performance art" than a classical understanding of the theatrical event and the "well-made play⁵." That can be attributed largely to their turn towards spirituality and their interest in non-European spiritual practices, which they both discuss - albeit arguably also appropriate - at great lengths. As a consequence, despite the word "ritual" appearing rarely - if ever - explicitly in their writings, their performances have since been repeatedly characterized and viewed as ritualistic. Drawing from that tradition, then, and repeatedly finding myself negating the space between theatre and performance art, it would be unwise of me to not acknowledge the constant emergence of "ritual" at the core of my work.

⁵ a type of play, constructed according to certain strict technical principles, that dominated the stages of Europe and the United States for most of the 19th century and continued to exert influence into the 20th (Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/well-made-play>)

As I started to conduct academic research into ritual and was able to find further support for the connection between the field of performance and rituals, through the writings and practice of Richard Schechner⁶ - yet another important influence in my practice, I was soon faced with the difficulty of having to give a specific definition for "ritual," with which I would continue to work for the purposes of this process. The answer came to me while reading an article published in The Journal of Chinese Sociology titled "The Structure of Ritual and the Epistemological Approach to Ritual Study" in 2018. In this article, anthropologist Qiao Wu elaborates on the difficulty anthropologists and other social scientists face when they attempt to give a definition of "ritual" that could account for all different ritual practices one can encounter throughout the world. In fact, he specifically argues in his introductory paragraphs that "although many distinguished scholars have contributed to ritual studies and much academic attention is paid to this field, a stable core concept is still lacking in academia as a whole" (Qiao, 2018). Whereas he finds a lot of common ground between anthropologists in the discussion that follows - in elements such as sacredness, taboo, symbolism and metaphor, and even recognizes the promise of Dutch scholar's Jan A.M. Snoek's theory put forth in his 2006 essay "Defining Rituals," he continues to reaffirm

⁶ The Future of Ritual, published in 1993, is a seminal work of Schechner, that examines ritualized behaviors and connections to performance.

his original thesis and offers, in conclusion, that the best way to easily define ritual would be as the activity one would encounter in a culture that is not their own that they would not understand (Qiao, 2018).

Choosing to take advantage of the looseness of this definition and being confident in the ritualistic aspects of my practice, I decided instead of formulating a specific working definition for my process, to allow different definitions to emerge through it - which was partly facilitated by the interviews I conducted and will further elaborate on later in this chapter - and instead identify aspects or characteristics of ritual that would be important to remain present across the changing definitions. The two characteristics that I decided my ritual explorations needed to have were "transformation" and "presence/mindfulness". By transformation, I mean the acquisition of an experience/insight through the engagement in the ritual that was not there previously; or, to put it in Baradian terminology, the emergence of a new sense of subjectivity through the ritualistic intra-action. Presence and mindfulness refer to an alignment of the physical and mental states, an awareness of the body and its relationality with the space and the other bodies - human or non-human - engaged, and a commitment to engaging with intention with the ritual practice.

Finally, my understanding of how ritual can be used as a tool for research within performance practices, and specifically in

relation to queerness and queer themes, finds me in alignment with the way it is employed in the project FUTURERITUAL, led by artist Joseph Morgan Schofield, who greatly inspired and mentored me in this research. Specifically, they explain on the project's website that "FUTURERITUAL positions ritual as a technology of speculative transformation, and the performance of ritual is understood as a method for divination and augury - as a way of mapping, visioning, fabulating or otherwise embodying potential queer futurities" (Schofield, 2021).

(QUEER) PHENOMENOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that is primarily concerned with phenomena, as they are experienced. It is a branch of philosophy that attempts to avoid causal explanations of the world, and puts consciousness and experience at its center. As a field, it was pioneered in the mid-20th century by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's book *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he refutes the separation between physical and mental conduct and maintains the idea of an 'embodied consciousness.' His theory has been very important in the fields of theatre and performance, as it presents the (whole) body as a tool of perception and generation of knowledge. It is also for the same reason that Phenomenology becomes an important school of thought through which my research can be understood.

Adding to the discourse of Phenomenology, Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, takes a queer turn on the field, focusing mainly on the question of 'orientation' and arguing that space is constructed in such a way so as to facilitate certain orientations (both sexual and not). If that space is arranged and understood in specific 'straight' lines, then anything that moves in-between or outside those is 'queer.' She uses the term 'disorientation' to characterize the experience of not being able to 'successfully' orient oneself in these straight arrangements of the world. She finds a subversive empowerment in disorientation, as it becomes a force with which the repetition of norms, patterns, conventions is broken and thus new potentialities-of-being emerge. This understanding of an embodied, spatial subversion of norms greatly informed my process, and I found myself constantly revisiting Ahmed's book during the studio experiments. Through it, I understand the ritual experiments of this research as a practice of "disorientation-together" with another body, and exploring possibilities of being and moving in space.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AS QUEER RESISTANCE

The practical obstacles and limitations such as lack of funding or scheduling difficulties were major contributors in my decision to put myself in the place of main study case, and the personal place where this research originated helped propel this decision even further. The academic readings I would

engage with later on, in trying to find scholarly support for my decision to use autoethnography would further support that decision and would help me understand autoethnography better as a subversive practice within academic discourses. In the third chapter of the book "Disidentifications," for example, Jose Esteban Muñoz discusses the use of autoethnography in the work of artist Richard Fung, who employs a hybrid approach that combines ethnographic and autoethnographic elements, usually to problematize the "Otherness" of his queer and Asian identities, in a North American context. In his analysis, Muñoz references literary critic Mary Louise Pratt's understanding of autoethnography as a counter-colonial practice. She says, specifically:

"I use the terms [autoethnography and autoethnographic expression] to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways which engage with the colonizers own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means in which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (Pratt in Muñoz, 1999, 81).

If one were to then broaden this statement, and see ethnographic work as discourse that creates - usually subjugated and/or minoritarian - "Othernesses," then autoethnography can be understood as a practice of reclaiming ownership over majoritarian discourse and subverting it by appropriating its own tools. It then seems fitting to employ it as the main modality of research, in a process that wishes to approach queerness beyond its "Otherness" and generate knowledge from a queer standpoint.

In an attempt, therefore, to avoid falling into the trap of engaging with autoethnographic modalities that would replicate majoritarian, normative models of conducting research, I found myself engaged with the book *Queering Autoethnography*. Writers Stacy Holman Jones and Anne M. Harris highlight the importance of autoethnography as a counter-majoritarian mode of research, but also retain the need to further “queer it”⁷ to ensure that this new field of research keeps expanding its potential to remain relevant and useful to the intersectional needs of our globalized societies while also growing to consider not only human, but also non-human and more-than-human subjectivities (2018, 4). Essentially, they argue for a consideration of intersectional post-colonial, post-structuralist and new materialist approaches in this growing and expanding field of research. Moreover, they articulate autoethnography as a “relational” practice, as “the work of autoethnography is the work of ‘assembling a we,’ a community of thinkers and writers and performers committed to speaking and embodying a collective and popular ‘will’” (2018, 7), which resonates with the new materialist perspective that subjectivities and objectivities, or in the case of this research

⁷ “As a method of intervention in autoethnography, queering practices “disturb the order of things” by creating dissonance around what passes as ‘normal’ and ‘normative,’ appropriating and assembling languages, texts, beliefs and ways of living and loving in radical and liberating ways; working against that which passes as stable, coherent, certain and fixed; and performing how words, thoughts, feelings and affective forces work and matter in our relationships and our representations” (Jones & Harris, 2018, 4)

simply “knowledges,” emerge through intra-actions; the very premise that this research has been based on.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROCESS

Moving on from the theorization to the execution of the experimentation process, I designed a basic structure that would constitute the basis - or steps - of the ritual. This structure became the core of nine - ten, if one considers the final performance - experiments that were conducted in a three month period. Those first nine experiments fall into two categories: rituals with other human bodies and rituals with other non-human bodies. In an attempt to avoid distinctions between the two categories as much as possible, the structure of the rituals remained the same in both and the order in which the experiments were conducted was random, insofar as they were not pre-planned but were lined up according to availabilities and flow of ideas. In every case, I was always one of the two participating bodies.

The first steps of the structure were designed so that it would be ensured that materiality and discourse would remain interdependent and of equal importance in the ritual, by guiding the participants through a process of meditation and breathing exercises. In that process, participants were invited to close their eyes, focus their attention in their own bodies through their breath, and consider notions of gender and queerness, from the academic to the personal. The invitation

then extended to the combination of those elements, where the reflections of gender and queerness could be identified as embodied experiences and “placed” as part of – or an extension of – the body, in hopes of achieving a liminal state where acute attention keeps flowing constantly between thoughts and actions. At that point, the process would open up to allow more agency to be given to the participants, who would be left to slowly and freely explore this state by moving through space, and eventually finding the other body – human or non-human – that they were sharing the ritual space with (Appendix A). In their movement-explorations and contact improvisation⁸, they were invited to maintain the liminal state that they had earlier found, and remain aware of the way the embodied perceptions and thoughts would shift and transform through moving in space and with another entity. I would come to call this modality “thinking-in-action” and will refer to it as such for the rest of this paper. No specific duration was set for these rituals, and an end was left to be found organically so as to allow for the process to better serve the dynamics and needs of the participants. After taking a few moments to allow the experience to “sit” with the participants, fifteen minutes were allocated for a reflection to be written.

⁸ A form of improvised dancing developed by American dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton, centered around the idea of exploration of one’s body in relation to another, through contact.

Although this core part of the process remained the same, there were two more parts to it, one before and one after the aforementioned one, in the rituals that I engaged in along with other human participants. Before engaging with the ritual practice, I would conduct a short interview with the other participant to listen to and understand their views and experiences on the three main topics surrounding this research – gender, queerness, and ritual, and then share with them how I’ve been approaching these topics in the context of the research and what the steps of the movement practice we were about to engage with were. After the ritual was performed and the reflections were written, a final collaborative, reflective discussion would occur. In that discussion we would share our individual reflections, highlighting experiences and discoveries that were important to us, and “reading” the other’s reflections through our own⁹ we would try to find common grounds and new understandings.

Besides myself, having being the main subject of the research, there were four other human participants. All four of them characterize their gender identity as queer, and though some may choose different words to describe theirs, all of their gender identities fall within the spectrum of what has been defined as a “non-binary identity” in this paper.

⁹ “diffractively engaging with texts and intellectual traditions means that they are dialogically read “through one another” to engender creative, and unexpected outcomes” (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016).

In addition to that, it is important to mention that all four of them are artists, from various disciplines, and at the time that this research was conducted they were all following an art's degree course in an academic institution. The diversity, or perhaps the lack of, in the choice of participants is reflective of the restrictions set by the time available and the location at which this research took place and will be further addressed in the closing chapter of this essay. Additionally, whereas the original intention was to include more human participants in this process and an invitation to participate was extended to more non-binary people in my environment, scheduling conflicts and limitations of time had to restrict the number to just four.

The choice of non-human bodies (NHB) was a more challenging undertaking and would slowly emerge through the process. The first NHB I experimented with was plaster, and it was inspired by the aforementioned third chapter of Muñoz's "Disidentifications." While discussing Richard Fung's work, he focused on a picture of the artist displayed next to the picture of a statue and offered a reading of it that identified the transgression of the binary relationship between the public and the private as a theme of the work. I, then, decided to experiment with the same theme by using plaster in order to transform my non-binary body into a living statue. As the plaster proved rather difficult to work with, while offering however valuable insights that greatly assisted

in the research, I chose to repeat the experiment using clay, which proved significantly easier to work with. The next three NHBs were then chosen after receiving advice from one of my mentors, for their archetypal function in a variety of rituals and in order to represent and develop my own performance vocabulary. Soil was selected as a symbol of both life and death and a connection to earth. Wine and olive oil were both inspired by my Greek heritage and the queer connotations they intrinsically carry with them, the former associated with Dionysus, the androgynous god of theatre and ecstasy, and the latter with the heavily homoerotic naked training that would take place in the Gymnasium, as well as the goddess Athena¹⁰.

The final experiment that took place at this state of the research, and which I will discuss in the following chapter, was the performance, in which for the first time human and non-human bodies were to be experienced simultaneously and an audience was to attend and participate in the ritual.

¹⁰ For more information, you may explore Pagan Grace: Dionysus, Hermes and Goddess Memory in Daily Life by Ginette Paris and Dionysus: Myth and Cult by Walter F. Otto

CHAPTER 3: AGGREGATION

*“Nonbinary in many ways is an interdisciplinary and transversal category of study which, rather than carving its very specific niche just in relation to what nonbinary is, has the opportunity to pull from all identity studies to craft something wholly new and radical in its uniting of how we understand marginalization and structures of domination and subjectivation.”
Evan Fusco “We Each Go Through So Many Bodies in Each Other”*

As the research was conducted in the context of a master’s program, the dissemination of the work was already indicated by the requirements of the course. The process and findings were to be disseminated through three different modalities: a final performance, a tangible portfolio, and this written thesis. The thesis, as an academic paper, serves the purpose of contextualizing the work within the academic and artistic fields, providing a clear account of the methodologies employed to conduct the research, and presenting notes, conclusions, and results generated through the process. The portfolio, which will be created after the submission of the thesis, will be in the form of a “zine¹¹” – paying tribute to and aligning this research with historically significant modes of creating underground and queer culture – and will be focused around the interviews and reflections that were produced in the process of this research. Finally, the performance, which was presented in May 2022, served as a way to physically disseminate the research by sharing the ritual and allowing for

¹¹ For more information: Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture by Stephen Duncombe (year)

an audience to experience it first-hand. As mentioned earlier, the final performance, which was called “Can’t Explain Why it Relates to Gender,” functioned not only as a final product for the purposes of the study program, but also as an extension of the research itself, and therefore another experiment.

“CAN’T EXPLAIN WHY IT RELATES TO GENDER”

Before the audience entered the space, they were given some program notes (Appendix B) to briefly identify the context and purpose of the performance, and to extend an open invitation for participation beyond watching. In the middle of the space, a protective sheet of plastic was placed with four NHBs – clay, soil, wine, olive oil – placed on four sides of the sheet, and in the center my naked body was already in the process of engaging in slow intra-actions with the NHBs. A projection against one of the white walls of the room remained present throughout the ritual, and it was comprised of passing passages of text, which was a semi-random assortment of the individual reflections that were produced in the previous experiments. A forty-three-minute-long music composition was playing from speakers around the room for the entirety of the performance. No chairs were placed in the space, leading the audience to find places to sit on the floor, against the walls that had no projection on them. A small table with paper towels was located close to the door, offering the audience a way to clean themselves if they decided to engage with the NHBs. Pens, reflection forms,

and a black box where the forms could be placed, were put on a table outside of the space, offering the possibility of sharing with me a reflection of the experience people went through in the ritual. The space was dimly lit from above, with a combination of warm and cold white lights that were spread around the room, in order to illuminate it evenly, with a small emphasis on the center where the plastic sheet was placed. The ritual ended along with the music, which slowly decreased in volume and intensity for the last few minutes, with a slow fade-out of the lights (Appendix C). None of the people present took the invitation to physically interact with my body or the NHBs, and only one person left behind a reflection form. It is also important to mention that even though the original intention was for the performance to be durational, in order to avoid conflict with university policies, it was shortened to one-and-a-half hours, the first half of which was performed without the presence of an audience.

As the performance was understood to be both a sharing of the work done in the research up to that point, and also a first step in new directions for the research to continue, expand and develop, most of the choices were made to facilitate that dual nature. All NHBs that I had previously worked with, with the exception of the plaster which was deemed “difficult” to work with – especially within the limited time of the performance, were present in the space not only to showcase the elements of the research conducted up to that point, but also as a first

attempt towards a multi-body exploration. The audience also became an extension of that condition with their presence in the space, despite their reluctance to physically engage with the action. Through the energy they brought in the space, the different ways in which they gazed at the actions, and through the – perhaps unintentional – movement of their bodies as they searched for new angles to experience, they became as much a part of the intra-actions of the ritual as the five bodies in the center.

Text became an integral part of the ritual, from the title, to the notes handed out to the audience prior to their entering, to the projection of the reflections, to the expectation of the new reflections the audience would provide. Primarily, text served as an agent of contextualization, framing the arguably abstract intra-actions that occurred in the space. The projected text, most significantly, provided the space with a certain citationality that allowed for the performative actions to become performative through their reference to practices past (see Chapter 1). It provided a certain discourse in which the materiality of the intra-acting bodies in the space could be placed. Additionally, it functioned as an extension of the invitation to participate that was offered through the program notes, as the multiple emerging subjectivities documented in the reflections attested to the personal and experiential meaning that can be found in the ritual, and encouraged subjective understandings and reflections to arise. This was

also reflected in the naming of the piece, as it was meant to offer a placing of the ritual around the theme of gender, while at the same time attesting to the impossibility of successful verbalization of the experience, and thus insinuating the need to personally engage with it.

Hospitality of the space became an issue of concern during the designing stages of this “final” performance, as a feeling of safety needed to be ensured in order to facilitate the audience in their participation. As the experience showed, participation was kept to a minimum, which offers me valuable insights into what could have been done differently. As explained earlier, there was an attempt to release power usually held by an artist orchestrating a performance. This was primarily done through the vulnerability of my body, as it was placed in the space fragile and naked. As an extension of that, the invitation for participation was carefully composed in order to open up the different modalities the audience could navigate through with their presence in the space, while not being intentionally pushed towards one or another. It was important for the audience to maintain as much agency as possible, so as to allow for the intra-actions to remain as organic and personal as possible. What I believe to have been an important element that prevented participation by perpetuating the power dynamics often at place in performance events, was the placement of the protective plastic sheet on the floor. Whereas the choice was primarily made for the practicality

of not irreparably damaging or staining the dance floor that exists in the space, it also unavoidably created a stage area that imposed a power distinction between my body which was already located in the space and the bodies that gathered around it. I believe that it is important to research for future iterations of the work, how to flatten the hierarchies inscribed through history in the performance space, and move towards a condition where the space is equally shared, going against the binary distinction between performers and audience members .

CONCLUSION

QUEER-IES IN RITUAL: A STUDY OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES IN EMERGENCE is a practice-based artistic research that proposes a reworking of the theory of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler through a new materialist perspective. Viewing performance as an apparatus in which performative intra-actions can take place, a series of performance-ritual experiments were conducted to study and document the emerging queer subjectivities, beyond their minoritarian status of the "Other."

Whereas I maintain that this research is far from completed, it is important to understand the limitations it has so far due to time restrictions, unavailability of participants, and lack of funds. The pool of participants was significantly confined to the context of an art school, with most of the participants coming from a (Western) European, Christian background, and having access to higher education. All of the participants were able-bodied and most of us enjoy the privileges that come with a perceived whiteness of race. It would therefore be reductive to draw definitive conclusions or postulate a theory, given the lack of intersectionality in the perspectives involved. In fact, doing so would constitute a contradiction with the very premises of the research, which wishes to claim the complexity of lived experiences in an academia that has

often attempted to reduce it to simple, identifiable labels and truths that are called 'universal' despite being applicable to only a fraction of the population.

I would argue that this research's biggest success lies in what promises to be a proof of concept. By using a performance methodology to achieve a state of "thinking-in-action," discourse and embodied/lived experiences of gender were explored by participants, and were recorded in the form of reflections. Despite the aforementioned inability to draw definitive conclusions due to the limited sample of participants, some common elements came to the foreground through the reflections. Those elements further exemplify one of the main arguments of this research, which is that queer subjectivities ought to be studied and viewed in relation to one another, in order for nuances to arise and be understood.

"With care and thoughtfulness, we were pushing each other out of our boxes, out of our habits of moving or exploring and into new potential. We were bold, because we were safe with each other."

"In connection to another body I noticed I was looking for an intimate way of being vulnerable. I searched for protection, safety. [...] Perhaps (pretty sure) those are things I crave on a daily basis, something that I want to do but am ashamed of."

"The entanglement of two queer bodies started to symbolize the ways in which our bodies, minds and knowledge are circumscribed, kept together, and disavowed within the socio-political grounds on which we live. However to me it also started to symbolize the growth of love, mutuality and support between queer bodies through which we can begin to live and thrive."

"A ground an open space simultaneously. It is scary to unfold but necessary to find ourselves in the center, with every other soul together." (excerpts from reflections with human participants)

What often arose in reflections, is the impression that despite the differences between the participants in the ways we visualized, verbalized, or even embodied our queer identities, due to the safety of the space that was held in common with another queer individual, we felt safe to explore, take ourselves out of our usual manner of perceiving ourselves and the world in relation to us, and **queer** even our own queer understandings.

Despite a strong desire to follow a post-humanist method and approach human and non-human bodies alike, I find myself in a position where a distinction is important to understand the findings of this research. I believe that this distinction rises from the fact that gender is a socially constructed concept, and can therefore more prominently be explored in inter(intra-) personal relationships. Whereas in the intra-actions with human participants, gendered reflections and understanding of the body were queered, allowing for an introspection on the embodied experience of gender to arise more easily, and therefore for relevant knowledge to emerge through our intra-active relationalities, the intra-actions with non-human bodies would often lead me to experience a state that I would call either pre- or a- gendered. By becoming a human/non-human aggregate, an organic hybrid of potentialities, I was able to disorient myself in the ways I've lived and moved inside my body, and understand the normativity imbedded even in the most unconscious modes of being, questioning the very finitude of our concept of "the human" body.

"As my body begins to be covered in a thick layer of oil, my body hair becomes more apparent to my touch, as it jumps out of the oil. I begin to use my touch to explore the entirety of my body at new speeds. The way my hands just glide along my skin allows me to tighten my grip as I caress my body, offering me the possibility of feeling my very musculature on a deeper level."

"But as it spreads through my body, and as most of it falls off, there's a thin layer of dust that remains. Even after I've tried to shake it off, that layer remains. And it changes the texture of my skin, makes it unfamiliar; makes it queer to me. With my eyes closed, my body starts to feel foreign to the touch, yet familiar from within. A conflict of disidentification."

"The boundaries between me and the clay have been crossed. We are no longer "me" and "you", no longer separate, binary entities. We are entangled and clear distinctions between us begin to lose their meaning. My body is still my body, but it can't move separately from the traces of clay on it." (excerpts from reflections with non-human participants)

Moving forwards, I believe that this research would need to take into account directions it failed to consider so far. There is a strong resonance with ideas of art as a community-building practice, and I strongly hold that such practices need to be studied further and be allowed to inform the ways in which this research was conducted. Furthermore, a group of participants with more diverse cultural, political, historical, economic, and racial backgrounds should be studied. The research should also avoid putting focus on the emerging subjectivities of one person - in this case myself - but attempt to draw more complex and nuanced pictures on a plethora of queer participants. Finally, more multi-bodied intra-actions, such as those encountered in the "Can't Explain Why it Relates to Gender" performance, should be facilitated, allowing once again for more complex reflections and understandings to arise.

Having highlighted the importance of hospitality for the performing dissemination of the work, I maintain that the research should remain focused, for the time being at least, on the hospitality of the ritual for the invited, queer participants. While disseminating the work further in a public performance setting could be of importance further down the line, it is the safety and intimacy of the space for the participants, who willingly engage with a process of queering their own sense of subjectivity, that ought to remain a priority. I believe, therefore, that the future of this research lies primarily in series of workshops, where rituals are collaboratively created and performed by queer participants, wishing to learn from and with one another.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

(Score/Steps of the Ritual)

Meditative Movement Improvisation

This list offers a simple break-down of the structure of the ritual. On each occasion, small alterations were made in the way they were offered, to accommodate the needs of the participants.

1. Focus on your breath - locate it in your upper pubic area.
2. Breath in from the nose, breath out from the mouth. First in your body's organic rhythm and then in counts of 8.
3. Bring in ideas, notions and personal experiences of gender and queerness in mind, while maintaining focus on your breathing.
4. Slowly start "sending" your breath to different parts of your body.

5. With every breath in, allow for your ideas, notions and experiences to enter your body and reside wherever your breath leads them to.

6. Start moving very slowly. Feel your body shift with tiny movements, interactions. Explore movement possibilities, while remaining aware of the ways embodied perceptions of queerness and gender may shift with movements of the body.

7. Without forcing it, find your exploration partner, when the need comes or contact occurs organically. Feel free to explore each other and together. Remain aware of the way your bodies - and your embodied perceptions - move and change together.

8. Feel free to use sound, if necessary and organic to your experience, but avoid language.

APPENDIX B

(Program Notes)

CAN'T EXPLAIN WHY IT RELATES TO GENDER

PERFORMANCE BY STELIOS TROULLAKIS
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF
ARTS IN PERFORMANCE PRACTICES



Maker/Performer: Stelios Troullakis
Music: Aspasia Nistikoufi
Thesis Supervisor: Daz Disley
External Mentors: Joseph Morgan Schofield, Nadja Mattioli
Research Participants: Tjerre Lucas Bijker, Marcel Tannous,
Lieven Hermse, Yinzk
Promo Picture: Stelios Troullakis

APPENDIX C

(Link to Performance Video)

The performance can be seen on YouTube, only by following this link: <https://youtu.be/xcDkwetsfr0>

In the case that the link no-longer works and you wish to watch documentation of "Can't Explain Why it Relates to Gender," you can request it via e-mail at trstelios@gmail.com

"Queerness is an aspiration toward the future. To be queer is to imagine better possible futures." - José Esteban Muñoz

A mixed-media presentation of an artistic research in progress, CAN'T EXPLAIN WHY IT RELATES TO GENDER is a result of a study on ritual and queer subjectivities as they emerge within the context of ritualistic actions. An attempt to understand gender outside the binary and voice the experience of queer, gendered subjects beyond the experience of subjugation.

In this process, queer people have been invited to 'think-in-action' and engage with their thoughts, their personal experiences, and queer theories, as they interact with bodies and materials.

What is gender to you? What makes you a man or woman? What doesn't? Have you wondered?

Today, you're invited to witness and experience this process. You may choose to remain an observer, or partake in interactions. In either case, I encourage you to take a few moments for yourself, to close your eyes, breathe deeply and consider how you experience gender in your own body. How does that experience transform while you move or interact?

Please, inhabit the space with consideration and care.

If you choose to engage in interactions, you can do so with the materials available, with my consenting body, another body that consents, or just your own body.

This space here, today is a space for exploration and a space to learn from each other's bodies. I implore you to engage with it in the way that best facilitates your experience.

If you wish to contribute further to my research, please write down a reflection of your experience in one of the forms placed on the table outside the room, and place it inside the black box.

You can also send it to me at trstelios@gmail.com

Reflections can be either eponymous or anonymous, according to your wishes.



Figure 1: Performance, CAN'T EXPLAIN WHY IT RELATES TO GENDER.
Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

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