

**A Vision for the Future of Non-Binary Fashion On Video:
Trans-Animal Conceptual Sculpture Performance Explorations**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Vision for the Future of Non-binary Fashion on Video is a practice-based research project that examines the relationship between trans and non-binary bodies to, public space through creative methods of wearable sculpture, dance, performance and experimental video. This project enacts my theory of gender pregnancy, that one can achieve a non-binary appearance through using garments, motifs, or colors typically associated with binary gender and juxtaposing them into one look that is full of gender.

This project dismantles binary notions of gender, public/private, mind/body and human/animal. Through the use of performance this project speaks to the transformative power of queer visibility in reclaiming public space. The resulting video, *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*, presents similarities between trans experiences and non-human animals in an to situate trans narratives as part of the ‘natural’ environment. Ultimately, this project engages with trans subjects and experiences to imagine queer collective futures in the interest of all.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	0
Author's Declaration	1
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Images	5

Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Key Terms	
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	
Chapter 3: Literature Review	
Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology	
Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis	
5.1 The Wearable Sculptures	
5.2 Audio and Video Overview	
Chapter 6: Public vs. Private Binaries	
Chapter 7: Body vs. Mind Binaries	
Chapter 8: Animal vs. Human Binaries	
Chapter 9: Artistic Influences	
Conclusion	45

Works Cited	48
Appendix	52

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 2. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 3. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 4. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 5 *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 6 *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 7. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 8 *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*. Dir Patrick James Edelman. Perf. Patrick James Edelman. 2018. Video

Figure 9. Yayoi Kusama, *Boat*, 1963 Installation View. Gertrude Stein Gallery, 24 E. 81 St. New York, New York.

Figure 10. Marina Abramovic, *Rhythm 0*, 1974 Performance Still. Tate Modern.

Figure 11. Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975 Performance Still. Tate Modern.

Figure 12. Laurel Nakadate, *365 Days of Tears*, 2010 Performance Still. Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects.

Figure 13. Ryan Trecartin, *Any Ever*, 2014 Video Still. MoMa Ps1.

Figure 14. Leigh Bowery, *Birth*, 1994 Performance Still. Wigstock.

Figure 15. Christeene, *Butt Muscle*, 2017 Music Video Still. Vimeo

Introduction

This Major Research Project (MRP) challenges the way that we think about our current fashion systems that enforce binary oppositions such as female/male, animal/human, body/mind and private/public. This project introduces my theory of gender pregnancy. This body of work explores gender pregnancy as a means for dismantling and redefining binary constructs. It conveys the idea that a person's presentation or dress can be loaded with disparate gender markers as a tactic for moving beyond binary gender. I have created works of wearable, conceptual sculptures that engage with ideas about queer theory, gender, trans issues, politics, bodies and identities. These soft sculptures are comprised of multiple stuffed phallic forms constructed in three different vintage floral patterns for each color set, I used three sets in total. The sculptures were then attached to the body and performed in public and private spaces to play out concepts of political visibility and ideas related to trans/non-binary bodies.

The performances were videotaped and assembled into a final 5-minute experimental video. The sculptures, sounds, and images used in this project elude to human/animal relations in an attempt to naturalize queer bodies and poke holes in human-made socially constructed binaries. The editing of the final video incorporates a non-linear narrative and explores themes of queer time. Together, the sculptures, performances and final video engage with the following questions: How do the wearable sculptures make visible my theory of gender pregnancy? How can

we look to non-human animals to show that gender is socially constructed in humans and to think about gender beyond the binary? And lastly, how does this project explore public and private spaces as a way of resisting the privatization of the queer body?

Gender pregnancy is a theory I developed for this MRP that extends from various schools of thought in queer theory about female masculinity (Halberstam) and drag as a gender destabilizing process (Butler). In relation to fashion, gender pregnancy is in opposition to gender neutral fashion collections that mostly consist of monochromatic minimalist sacks or menswear inspired clothing for women's bodies. Gender-less collections have been a trend on the runway as discussed by fashion writer Robin Givhan:

"...the current tide is full of nuance and energy, unlike the stoic detachment that typically defines androgyny. It is less gimmicky. Designers aren't putting one or two skirts on the runway in a sedate shade of navy or in the familiar shape of a sarong. They are dedicating entire collections — entire businesses — to genderless dressing."(Givhan)

Givhan is describing a trend of gender neutral dressing but also eluding what I refer to as, gender pregnant garments. Among other designers, Givhan references Gucci under the direction of Alessandro Michele who has cast trans models and has been praised for his feminine menswear collections. Simply because a collection is trying to get outside of gender binaries does not mean that the garments are devoid of gender.

Gender is very complex and loaded with meaning. A person can express gender in more nuanced ways than systems of binary gender can suggest. The

visual mash-up of markers that are traditionally thought of as either male or female, offer potentialities that shift based on the viewers perspective and always possess characteristics that are female, male, and beyond. The sculptures in my video convey the complexities of gender by resembling many human sexual characteristics but also could be read as non-human species that reproduce asexually such as some forms of sea creatures, coral reefs or microscopic bacteria. In addition the fact that the sculptures are stuffed mimics the idea of pregnancy. A key aim of this project is to challenge dominant ideologies related to gender and sex, and insist that queers cannot be satisfied with a version of equality that does not allow for intersectionality or freedom in choices of gender expression. My video takes place in public spaces as a way of taking back the right to be visible as marginalized people and actively resist the push towards the invisible and private.

Chapter 1

Key Terms

Non-binary and Trans or Transgender: For the purposes of this paper I am using the terms non-binary and trans- interchangeably. Binary notions of identity are prevalent in western societies and categorize people as either male or female from birth. Transgender is defined as a person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and therefore to be non-binary is to be trans. The term transgender comes from an intermediary term between transsexual and transvestite. A person who elects to augment their physical sexual characteristics in order to be in alignment with their gender – transsexuals. Transvestites are people

who wear the clothing of what society deems the opposite gender from the one they were assigned at birth. (Ryan 6)

Homonormativity: This project borrows from Lisa Duggan's definition of homonormativity which states "gayness in service of the hetero norm."

Homonormativity is perpetuated by cisgender white gay men who embrace neo-liberal values and conservative politics at the expense of the rest of the queer community. Duggan further says that homonormativity is achieved by the state through "a rhetorical remapping of public/private boundaries designed to shrink gay public spheres and redefine gay equality [...] as access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the 'free' market, and patriotism." (Duggan 29)

Queer Utopia: Jose Esteban Munoz's writes about the importance of looking at queer histories to inform our artistic practices and collectivist attitude. Queer utopias for Munoz are described in his manifesto: "We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future." (Cruising Utopia 38)

Queer Temporality: My video understands queer temporality as a way of experiencing time that is outside of heteronormative benchmarks such as getting married, giving birth, graduating from university and other socially constructed rites of passage. Jack Halberstam further elucidates the notion of queer time in this quote:

“Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence- early adulthood- marriage- reproduction- child rearing- retirement—early adulthood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity” (Halberstam 182)

Halberstam illuminates the need to create representations that reflect the ways in which queers experience time differently than that of their normative counterparts.

Becoming: ‘Becoming’ is a concept that is central to the way trans bodies are perceived but in actuality ‘becoming’ is central to the human experience because bodies are porous and open to influence from external factors. Time and circumstances effect our bodies and they are being influenced by the environment through the air we breathe or micro-particles that we ingest unintentionally. The following quote outlines my use of the word in this context and a bit of epistemological history:

“[...] the notion of becoming is fundamental to poststructuralist, feminist theories of the body, such as the work of Rosi Braidotti (2000,2002), Judith Butler (1993, 1999), Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 2011), and Margrit Shildrick (2002), where it is used as a way of undermining the dichotomies of nature/culture, body/technology, and self/other. (Garner 31)

For trans people our becoming is perhaps more visible on a public level and heightened because sometimes transitions can take place in a matter of months expediting the ‘becoming’ process.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this MRP relies heavily on queer and trans theory. Judith Butler's ideas about gender as a performative act are particularly influential. Butler explains how and why gender is regulated on a public level as an exclusionary tactic and one of maintaining the power of the majoritarian heteronormative class:

"Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes. To assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender that do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance"

(Undoing Gender 42)

The meanings of gender are always a moving target because gender is something that we do, not something that we are. Therefore, gender must constantly be regulated in relation to normative, dominant ideologies. Ideas about what is typically associated with the masculine must therefore be set in opposition to ideas about what is typically associated with the feminine in order for this binary gender system to function. If these categories are combined or reorganized as this work attempts to do, then gender can be re-made and reshaped into categories that allow for a more nuanced expression.

Kate Bornstein's theory that being a 'tranny' is a state of being and should be a category unto itself has informed my project's understanding of systems outside of binary gender. If gender is performative then we must always be in a process of becoming our gender through a series of performative choices made on a daily basis, for example; getting dressed, deciding how to get our hair cut, the way

we walk, what bathrooms we decide to use, and what communities we affiliate with.

“What about the notion, suggested by Kate Bornstein, that a transsexual cannot be described by the noun of ‘woman’ or ‘man,’ but must be approached through active verbs that attest to the constant transformation which ‘is’ the new identity or, indeed, the ‘in-betweenness’ that puts the being of gendered identity into question?” (xii). (Bodies that Matter xxii)

Butler has also explicitly referenced drag saying in “imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself.” It is important here to make a distinction between the ways that drag and trans-ness function differently in terms of destabilizing gender. Since, I am working from Bornstein’s definition of trans-ness which relies on the idea that trans-ness is a third designation thereby destabilizing the binary gender system. Drag by comparison relies heavily on hyperbole and exaggeration and similarly plays with ideas of the feminine and masculine that are not inherently tied to the sexual categories of man or woman.

Jack Halberstam does extensive research on what he calls “kinging” or the act of doing drag as a drag king: “Drag kinging is more than the visual and stylistic presentation of the performance; it is also about the act of revealing the instability of gender roles—in this case masculinity, what it is and how it is produced. As Halberstam has argued, drag kinging is one mode of making ‘assaults upon dominant gender regimes.’” (Geczy 122). Similarly ‘female impersonators’ are taking the idea of what it means to be female and subverting it. Reflecting the absurdity of culturally desirable beauty standards, drag queens satirize and make fun of heteronormative narratives. If heteronormative culture says that having an hourglass figure is an essential female or womanly trait, then drag queens parody

this expectation with double D prosthetics and corseted waists. Instead of trying to resemble a “woman”, drag queens are approximating the idea of a “woman” and in this way, drag exposes that the idea of “woman” is plastic to begin with.

This project relies on film theory and aesthetics as resistance.

Halberstam outlines how queer and trans people can use film conventions to create uniquely trans images. In the Chapter “Transgender Looks” from *In A Queer Time and Place* Halberstam writes about the symbolic imagery in the film *Boys Don’t Cry* and how when the central trans character is experiencing moments of trauma the camera shifts out the window and goes elsewhere, inhabiting the trans psyche of Brendan Teena by disassociating or dreaming of an alternate reality where the body is safe and normal. My video uses experimental video techniques, in particular the technique of direct address (looking directly into the camera) as a way of taking control of creating my own trans/non-binary images.

bell hooks writes extensively about the black oppositional gaze as a theory of resistance and a direct challenging of cultural norms. hooks writes about black history in America and segregationist laws that made it illegal for a black person to meet the gaze of a white person. Hooks proposes an active oppositional gaze as a technique for taking power through aesthetics and proposes the creation of black images by black image makers. Similarly trans-bodies have been legislated against. My video combines Halberstam’s theory with hooks’ theory to create a trans-oppositional gaze. The trans-oppositional gaze proposes an aggressive act of taking up public space while transgressing gender norms.

The trans-oppositional gaze is indebted to Jose Esteban Munoz's theory of dis-identifications that functions as a way for minority voices to seize social agency through visible identity formations:

"Disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production. For the critic, disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representation hierarchy." (Disidentifications 25)

The above quote represents a key perspective of this MRP, reinterpreting fashion systems through a trans-subject position. This project presents a vision of what fashion might look like if it didn't subscribe rigidly to male/female binaries. I am a producer of images at the same time I am receiving and disidentifying with images in fashion that do not represent or reflect a non-binary narrative.

Susan Stryker is a trans theorist whose work focuses on the positionality of trans perspectives within the queer community. She explains why trans-ness is still at the low end of the privilege spectrum in terms of homonormative hierarchies:

*"While queer studies remains the most hospitable place to undertake transgender work, all too often *queer* remains a code word for 'gay' or 'lesbian,' and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity."* (Stryker 214)

'Queer' as an umbrella term is meant to encompass trans identities but because queer identities are so varied and individual interests are bi-furcated encompassing such varied identities is difficult to impossible. There is a homo-normative mentality that other queer people will fight for trans rights after they push through legislation that is more palatable to heteronormative lawmakers.

Julia Kristeva is a feminist theorist and cultural critic who explains how abjection functions as a method for destabilizing gender.

“Abjection, as Kristeva describes it, ‘disturbs identity, system, order’ and encompasses a kind of borderline uncertainty—ambiguous, horrifying, and polluting. Transgendered bodies, then, especially when viewed as physical bodies in transition, defy the borders of systemic order by refusing to adhere to clear definitions of sex and gender.”

(Phillips 20)

In my video, my abject body is transformed in many ways; through interactions with the public space, through wearing the costumes, through dance, and through interactions with passersby.

This MRP practices dynamics of monstrous femininity, the abject, the bodily, and the comical as familiar tools for creating trans personas. Monstrous femininity is borrowed from Barbara Creed who was working with Freud’s conceptions about castration and the male fear of the feminine as inherently destructive and deceptive. Creed writes on the monstrous womb, a topic fitting for my MRP;

“From classical to Renaissance times the uterus was frequently drawn with horns to demonstrate its supposed association to the devil. ‘Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing’ (Kristeva, 1982, 77)” (Creed 43).

My project argues that the monstrous femininity can be extended to feminine ‘men’ as well as non-binary and trans people.

This MRP challenges the positionality of trans and non-binary images within fashion and asserts a voice that offers a perspective as an alternative to homonormative narratives. This project repositions trans fashion artists as producers of ideas rather than

simply muses or sources of inspiration. By placing my trans body at the forefront of the project and by producing, editing, filming, and making sound for the video I am asserting the right to self-fashion and control the way my identity is perceived.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The state of the literature on non-binary identity is varied and diverse. Much of the current literature that informs this scholarship surrounding trans-animality comes from the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* Journal. In addition, the anthology *Queering the Non-human* has an “Animal-Trans” chapter that speaks to the symbolic significance that non-human animals have played for humans in relation to sex and marriage dynamics throughout history. The book, *Queer Ecologies* has been useful in framing rhetorical narratives surrounding privacy, decency, nature, biology, politics and the body. The chapter titled “Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity” has informed this project explicitly as it highlights endocrine disrupting DDT and similar pesticides and the impact on suburban amphibians with mixed sexual characteristics. The ‘queer frogs’ have served as a visual signifier in this project for the panic surrounding the implications of non-human animal species as a metaphor for the future of humans.

Audrey Black’s article “High Fashion and Projection of Transgender Bodies: Queer Strategy in the Barneys New York Spring 2014 Campaign” does an expert job of unpacking trans narratives in visual culture by sharing some helpful statistics. The article points out that heteronormative representations of transgender identities focus on a from-this-to-that model of transitioning. Most trans narratives emphasize that an MTF trans person was born male then transitioned and now they are female. Black points out how this

is the exception to the rule since 3/4ths of trans people do not elect to medically transition in any way. Black also points out how the from-this-to-that ideology re-enforces gender binaries by actively suppressing narratives of trans people that are in-between or outside of the male/female system.

Queering the Interior edited by Andrew Gorman-Murray and Matt Cook and “Home is the Place we all Share: Building Queer Collective Utopias” by Olivier Vallerand write about space from queer perspectives. To trans people, how we move through our daily lives can involve drastically different presentation depending on the physical space we are occupying at the moment or plan to occupy throughout the day. My video emphasizes the queer body as aberrant to resist privatization and queer public spaces by being hyper-visibly queer. Much of the rhetoric surrounding bathroom legislation and similar initiatives that disallow and criminalize cruising rely on the idea that the queer body is a hypersexualized body. John Potvin writes in *Queering the Interior*:

“Historically the need for queers to take possession of a parcel of the urban environment has played a significant role in the struggle for recognition and the politics of sexual encounter and visibility. This political and cultural struggle has led scholars to focus their attention almost exclusively on same sex activities and sexual geographies with the public sphere, to the detriment of the more putatively private domain the domestic sphere.” (Potvin 161)

My video problematizes visible sexuality by juxtaposing three performances in public spaces with a more intimate performance that takes place in an interior where the subject is self-pleasuring.

Joelle Ryan’s dissertation chronicles trans representation in cinema up until 2009. Ryan’s work has been useful in framing and cataloging stereotypical representations of trans and non-binary people on film such as classic queer characters like Buffalo Bill in

Silence of the Lambs. Ryan points out that Buffalo Bill and the character of Norman Bates in *Psycho* are loosely based on the serial killer Ed Gein who was rumored to have been transsexual and wanted to make a skin suit of a woman to embody femininity. The transphobic narrative was based purely on folklore and was not substantiated by anyone who knew Gein or factual evidence. Ryan's dissertation situates histories of the politics of trans representation.

Much of the current literature around gay subcultural dress privileges gay male perspectives although some of the scholarship surrounding interpretations of drag is especially intersectional. Jim Daems edited an anthology of essays about *RuPaul's Drag Race* queens that thoughtfully unpacks transphobic and racist ideologies in the show and interrogates how such ideologies play out visually. There is also a helpful chapter in *Queer Style* titled "Drag of Kings and Queens" that outlines the prevalent ideologies surrounding drag and gender disruption, some of which I have referenced previously, such as mimicry, parody, exaggeration, and hyperbole.

The journal *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* (despite its very binary title) has provided interesting insights into fashion history as well as preserving the history of Leigh Bowery's birth performances and unpacking their meaning. Leigh Bowery is an English drag performance artist who wore costumes that were highly conceptual and contorted the body through stuffing, mixing patterns, and prosthetics. However, the research relies on the narrative of 'man dressing up as a woman' and oversimplifies Bowery's aesthetic power.

Don We Now Our Gay Apparel by Shaun Cole does a good job of describing tactics of communication and sartorial choices among subcultural groups of mostly gay

men. Unfortunately, much of the fashion scholarship that does reference trans issues is problematic including “Gender Rebels: Inside the Wardrobes of Young Gay Men with Subversive Style” by Ben Barry and Dylan Martin. This quote is an example of ways in which gay men have co-opted trans aesthetics without reference to the contributions made by trans people;

“In fashion, garments and images promote new transgendered appearances: ‘These dramatic looks are not the androgynous blending of categories identified with postmodernism; rather, the new looks combine masculine visual markers such as facial hair with very feminine appearance signs such as make-up, skirts and heels’ (Morgado 2014: 324).”(Barry and Martin 230)

Special attention should be paid to the use of the term ‘transgendered appearances’ which implies the past tense of an identity and also suggests that transgender people appear a certain way. This scholarship also makes no reference to transgender people or to trans history of criminalization that has made it possible for these gay men to dress in ways that are ‘subversive’ according to Barry and Martin.

This MRP seeks to fill the gap between fashion studies, trans-animality, fine art, and queer theory. Fashion is a dynamic and important site for the reclamation and formation of identity politics and this project serves to position trans and non-binary identity at the forefront of fashion. This project reasserts a need to collapse binaries by approaching gender and the body from a multidimensional perspective.

Chapter 4

Methods and Methodology

This MRP privileges lived experience and knowledge as a method of knowing and uses sociological theory and queer theory as a basis for interpreting social interactions

of the queer body in heteronormative spaces. This project consists of conceptual, wearable sculptures that are worn in public and private spaces. The resulting footage is edited into a short experimental video. Developed over time, my art practice uses conceptual sculptures as a visual metaphor and semiotic tool. The hand-sewn shapes are stuffed and wearable in multiple ways. The sculptures are all constructed in relation to the work of Yayoi Kusama. For example, in work such as *Boat* 1964 (Figure 9), where she has covered a row boat with multiple phallic forms. My practice emerged out of a fine arts background and has moved towards wearable sculpture.

In the video, I dress in a series of costumes that are visibly queer and dance or otherwise interact with the architecture and other humans in public spaces. The spaces I chose were intentional landmarks around Toronto; the tiger at Christie Pits (Figure 1), the scaffolding that is now at the site of the demolished Honest Eds (Figure 2), the rainbow painted tunnel (Figure 3), and another set of scaffolding at the intersection of Yonge and Bloor (Figure 4). I chose these spaces because they were already queer or had maximum potential to be queered by my body. I also took into consideration the amount of foot-traffic and the time of day of filming.

My creative method relies on bricolage with an interdisciplinary approach. This project straddles the domains of performance art, drag, dance, film, narrative, high art, fashion, and queer theory. Dallas Baker explains the use of bricolage as being a specifically queer tactic in creative practice led research;

“Bricolage is something that is enacted. In other words, bricolage as approach or method can be seen as a kind of performance, an enactment of multidisciplinary and diverse or plural positionality. Bricolage as an artifact is a discourse or text that draws on multiple disciplines or theories, and perhaps more importantly, fuses styles or genres. Stewart

argues that the bricoleur (the user of bricolage) ‘appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary’ (2001: 127).” (Baker 40)

Queers have always been doing this, taking a little bit from column A and a little bit from column B and fusing them to make something else. As queer people we have to reconcile the fact that the dominant culture was not made for us and develop our own systems of meaning. Unfortunately, when we do create subcultural dress, it is often quickly co-opted by the dominant culture and used as a tool of capitalism. To resist co-optation queer people have created more and more nuanced codes of communication often utilizing bricolage.

This project embodies dance and stage performance tactics that are usually associated with drag culture, such as the ‘duck walk’ or ‘voguing’, and runway walking. Movements that have come out of queer culture and have often been co-opted by the mainstream. In this case, most famously ‘voguing’ which originated in underground circles as a sort of dance battle enacted by queer youths as a way of playing out rivalries non-violently. This project incorporates hyper-stylized voguing movements as a nod to drag history and histories of underground queer dance movements.

‘Drag is employed as a convention of expressing the performative nature of identity. ‘Drag’ utilizes fashion to manipulate the body in extreme ways such as padding and corsetry. In the video, I bound my waist, attached an orchid to my head with tape, tucked, shaved, painted my nails, wore high heels, and applied exaggerated make-up often adhering glitter to my face with glue.

The method of practice-led research as defined by Smith and Dean (2009) informs this MRP;

“In using the term practice-led research, we... are referring both to the work of art as a form of research and to the creation of the work as generating insights which might be documented, theorized and generalized... Ideally we would expect a research element to be present in both research and work creation, though we would normally see the documentation, writing and theorization that surround the artwork as crucial to its fulfilling all the functions of research.”(Baker 35)

This project imagines what it would look like to have creative, affirming representations of non-binary fashion expression. The process of making this video is research, the performances are research, and the lived experience that I am drawing upon is research. This paper and the documentation of theory, literature, and outcomes is a part of the research process.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Analysis

The Wearable Sculptures:

The wearable sculptures serve as an extension of my body, in doing so, crosses lines between the borders of body and space. The phallic forms can be read as extending off of the body like a growth. The forms are elegant and comic while being hauntingly abject. Julia Kristeva outlines in the *Powers of Horror*, that the abject refers to the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and others. (Harrington)

The sculpture can be considered abject because it is made of cast-off, repurposed clothing. The utility of the clothing is then ‘rendered useless’ when converted into an art object. These items of clothing have been cast off either at the thrift store, in the garbage, or the back of the closet. The cast-off textile is a visual metaphor for identities that are marginalized or no longer fit. This project explores the making of the self through refashioning objects and filling them with meaning, while simultaneously focusing on what

others consider the detritus or debris of the traditional binary fashion system. For example, the thrifted construction vest in itself is not an object that collapses gender hierarchies, but when paired with obnoxiously neon orange tights and eight-inch wood and snake skin platforms, the meaning is shifted. The vest on its own would connote masculinity, utility, and progress. When worn with typically feminine garments the vest is queered.

This project challenges binary gender with the form of sculptures, color, the use of threes, and the ways the sculptures are worn. The most obvious way the sculptures confront gender binaries is by their generally phallic shapes juxtaposed with what are typically feminine patterns or florals, in bright colors. I chose tertiary colors for the sculptures to draw parallels to categories that are multiples of three instead of duality or binaries. The colors that I incorporated into the video are a bright orange, bright pink, and bright green. Each set of sculptures also contains three patterns as another visual marker of threes as an alternative to binaries. Kate Bornstein explains 'tranny' as an alternative to binary gender, "Tranny is a word coined by the outcast trans people -- drag queens, transsexuals, transvestites, whores and street fairies -- in Sydney, Australia in the mid to late '60s and early '70s." (Nichols) The sculptures are attached to the body in a way that is both absurd and comical, one is a head piece, the other serves as a sort of breast plate, and the final dangles between my legs. The intent is to draw attention to areas of the body that are typically associated with sexual characteristics.

The wearable sculptures illustrate my concept of gender pregnancy as they combine disparate forms typically attributed to male or female gender, patterns and associated ideologies. Gender pregnancy, as an idea, originated in part by looking to ways that other species give birth. Since I knew I wanted to have a family and raise children, as a

queer individual, I sought out alternatives to heterosexual reproductivity from a very young age. When I found that the male seahorses give birth, this opened up the possibility for agency of my own reproductivity and inspired me to explore different options for having children. As I began to make these sculptures and to use my own body to interact with them, I realized that they conveyed the concept of mixing gender markers by being floral and hand-sewn, attributes stereotypically associated with the feminine and domesticity, contrasted with the phallic and taking up excessive amounts of space, traits typically associated with the masculine.

Audio and Video Overview:

My video, called *Trans-Animal Fashion Futures*, includes audio that interrogates and challenges heterosexist perceptions of trans people. The video is 4 minutes and 24 seconds and encompasses four performances over a period of several months. The audio in the video is pseudo-scientific and it challenges the ways medical communities have shaped the conversation around gender in a way that is heteronormative and reinforces hierarchies. For example, gender is assigned at birth by doctors or even sometimes before birth due to ultrasound technologies. Often intersexed folk who are born with ambiguous genitalia are given surgeries that are seen as “gender confirming” however this act mutilates the body without the individual’s consent. The video confronts narratives that medicalize the trans and non-binary body and reimagines, and queers, the biological world through imaginary statements such as “their ovaries would have to be attached to frog versions of fallopian tubes that would disperse the eggs” and “so every-time you see a red-head there’s going to be an intersexed person.” Here, the audio provides trans-oppositional statements that challenge the ludicrous ideas made by institutions against trans

and non-conforming bodies. These statements originated through Jai's active imagining when confronted with heteronormative narratives.

In order to destabilize narratives around gender I used mainly two voices in the video. One was the voice of a friend named Jai, who was transitioning and taking testosterone, and whose voice deepened over the course of filming. The other was a friend, Laura, who identifies as female and has a hyper feminine pitch that I distorted in editing through the use of slow motion in order to "masculinize" it. The distortion of the voice is a play on the monstrous feminine and female masculinity or as a way of queering her typically feminine sounding pitch. Butler talks about ways that the butch or female masculinity is disruptive to binaries and monstrous:

"The suggestions that butch, femme, and transgendered lives are not essential referents for a refashioning of political life, and for a more just and equitable society, fails to acknowledge the violence that the otherwise gendered suffer in the public world and fails as well to recognize that embodiment denotes a contested set of norms governing who will count as a viable subject within the sphere of politics." (Undoing Gender 28)

The choice of using two different voices and then shifting the pitch through Jai's hormone treatment over time along with the slow-motion effect used on Laura's voice is an audio approximation of effeminate masculinity and butch femininity that destabilizes binary thinking.

By stating pseudo-scientific, imaginary 'facts', the audio presents a version of trans identity that is antagonistic to heteronormative culture. The first two lines of the video are "They're omnivores, so are chip-monks, chip-monks eat frogs" followed by "and so every time you see a red-head there's going to be an intersexed person." Both of these lines are spoken by the same person, Jai. The first was pre-testosterone and the second after

almost a year of taking hormones. Jai's voice has dropped considerably but also his ideologies seem to have gotten queerer. The audio is queerer in that the first recordings Jai only spoke of the dietary habits of other species, in the second recordings Jai speaks about queer reproductivity and intersexed individuals. The second quote, a sort of fallacious reasoning that corresponds the statistical number of red-heads on the planet with the number of people who are intersexed, helps to create a science that is uniquely queer. This misinterpretation of the facts can be considered a disidentification (Munoz) or a new way of receiving and relaying facts about our communities. Jai is effectively communicating that trans people can write and mythologize our own narratives in opposition to the way heterosexist culture has been pathologizing trans bodies. To offer contrast, the hyper-femme voice of my friend Laura is slowed down immediately afterwards proclaiming "a lot of it had to do with the biological basis of..." This line acts as a sort of call and response of queer facts met with heteronormative skepticism. The audio of her saying "oh!" afterwards confirms that she is in agreement with Jai's ideas, or at least is willing to entertain them.

Throughout the video, I relied on the audio from children reacting to my 'green' costume to convey the affective complications of trans people in public environments. The children's collective reaction to me is somewhere between fear and excitement. One little girl says "oh my god, oh my god!" As I reassure her "It's not scary." Another child proclaims "You have a green face!" with the wonder and bewilderment. The children's reaction was one of shock and horror at seeing me in drag. I felt obligated to make sure they were not afraid of me, echoing the emotional labor that many trans people feel of having to manage other people's fear or negative emotions about their identity.

My personal experience of creating this project was at times dangerous and difficult as I performed in public spaces. I also found that people had a visceral reaction to the destabilizing nature of the project and saw my body as producing confusion and causing problems instead of inspiring hope or creating meaning.

The video opens with an image of a light-up tiger that inhabits the world of public sculpture, animality, and queerness. The light-up tiger represents strength and fierceness while still being playful and having a sense of human characteristics. The irony of the tiger, being a predatory creature that is also a landmark and a symbol of happiness and prosperity, inhabits an in-between space. In addition, the stripes of the tiger correspond with the stripes of the construction uniform. Here, the adage that ‘a tiger can’t change its stripes’ verses the idea of construction as a transitional state reflects our sense of nature and the human body as static while both are in fact dynamic and changing.

The use of animal imagery and time-editing effects symbolize concepts of queer time and space in relation to subjectivity. The animals in the video become progressively more abstract or less human echoing the non-linear narrative that progresses towards an abstract and interior thought-world. The video has a growing sense of tension that breaks with the release of the final image of all the sculptures combined into one garment. The technique of slow motion, fast forwarding, and repetition in my video is an attempt to create space and reassert interiority as important and authentic. Queer and trans people experience the world differently than their heterosexual counterparts and my video exaggerates these differences to position the viewer as a queer peer caught up in the reality of the subject. Halberstam elucidates this concept:

“A ‘queer’ adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space. And in fact, much of the contemporary theory seeking to disconnect queerness from the essential definition of homosexual embodiment has focused on queer time and space practices.” (In a Queer Time and Place 6)

Halberstam is highlighting the ways that homonormativity aligns itself with heteronormative structures to deny difference. This video re-inscribes and exaggerates that difference through costume, dance, comedy, and images of the abject.

A sense of foreshadowing is established through formal qualities of shape and color reminiscent of the queer person’s relationship to time. In the opening performance I am frantically interacting with silver scaffolding in a hyper-visible state and thus rendered vulnerable in public. As I enact panic with my body language as the camera follows me surveilling. The triple image that follows of the three spinning figures creates stripes that mirror the top that I’m wearing and form a relationship to the tiger’s stripes. My body is frantic again spinning between two poles that represent binaries. My body forms a visual “X” marks the spot of my existence between binaries. For a split second the jellyfish image flashes as the construction worker says “You gotta get this sideshow outta here please.” (Figure 5). This image is a promise of more queer and abstract things to come.

As the video progresses, the images of animals alongside audio eludes to concepts of queer utopias and inter-species connections. In the video, a frog image flashes during the pink scene as I am performing fellatio on the sculpture. The frog image relates to sex panic about frogs outlined previously, fear around male-reproductivity and dropping sperm counts as evidence that endocrine blocking substances like DDT could be affecting humans negatively. The jellyfish image is a further example of a borderless body inspiring

fear in the viewer related to toxicity and non-entity while simultaneously inviting you to identify with it. At the very end of the film, the three animal images are shown again this time with more clarity as a way to reinforce the audio that says “All we are is just another species.” These animals literally are a different species. Queer people are seen and treated as different species, as foreign, as inhuman, as post-human, as abject, and as beyond or outside of gender. This statement and compilation of images urges the viewer to imagine queer utopic futures with us, to imagine how the inclusion of trans identities could be viewed as a marker of progress and innovation. Finn Jackson Ballard describes how currently fear is an obstacle for achieving utopia: “While we aspire that one day our entire cities, not just our bars, will be safe spaces, for the moment these community focal points remain extremely important, for we do remain vulnerable outside them. (Ballard 463)

Chapter 6

Private vs. Public Binaries

Throughout history, queer bodies have been legislated against and seen as a liability in public spaces or a blight on common decency. This project uses methods of hypervisibility as a way of challenging the notion that queer people are acceptable only in private spaces. Kate Bornstein believes that to be trans is a gender designation in itself, that trans identity is always in-between or outside of normativity. In the first third of the video the orange outfit is neon and mimics the hypervisible uniforms of the construction workers as a way of being seen and refusing to be ignored or silenced.

Trans theory refuses the notion that the goal of transitioning is to pass within a binary gender system. ‘Passing’ means that a person is readable on a public level as a cisgender male or female person; no one can tell that a ‘passing’ person is trans. In the

video, tactics of camouflage are used as a way of blending or ‘passing’ into environments to seek safety against the dominant majority. Passing as a particular gender is often seen as a goal for trans people. If a trans person can ‘pass’ as a binary gender they avoid violence and fit into a gender binary. However, this project challenges the notion that passing is desirable and asserts a trans identity that problematizes such binary notions that reproduces dominant ideologies related to gender.

Tensions between visibility/invisibility are enacted in the video with representational images that are obscured or abstracted. For instance, the first close-up shot of the tiger made of lights where one cannot discern its form. (Figure 6) Also, in the green scene, the frog image is always slightly off center or too close, limiting its recognition (Figure 7). The floral prints on the sculpture blend into the background of the scaffolding at Yonge and Bloor because of the similar foliage patterns. Several times throughout the video, the progression of an image is obscured and then images gradually come into clarity and recognition. Often the initial frames of a scene will consist of an entirely abstracted image, the next frames will be partially obscured or pluralized, and finally the coherent body and sculpture will present itself. This movement from invisibility to a hypervisibility mimics the patterns of identity formation for trans individuals; from the obscure notion when one realizes they are different, then becoming more explicit and hyper-visible, rendering the trans subject vulnerable.

Gender politics are enacted in a series of nuanced public negotiations with trans bodies often seen as a point of debate. The debate has been elevated to the world stages including the recent legislation in the United States around bathroom ordinances that

forbid trans people to use public bathrooms that correspond with their gender, at schools or anywhere in public.

“Queer space theory critiques the assumption that spaces can be designed, or analyzed, without considering how an individual’s self-identification (in relation to gender and sexuality, but also to age, race, and class categories) influence their use of their environment. Most of these approaches have come from geography, with relatively few scholars in architecture exploring such themes.” (Vallerand 65)

Public space is important for playing out gender conventions because gender is socially constructed and negotiated through performative acts. The social construction of gender is mutually agreed upon and people usually attempt to read gender upon first seeing another person in public as a way of categorizing them. This project confronts such issues and explores the relationship between the trans body and public space.

In this project, I perform in public, liminal spaces such as construction sites, passageways, and tunnels to engage with trans relationships to public space. Liminal spaces are particularly conducive to trans or non-binary narratives because the word transgender evokes ephemerality and metamorphosis. ‘Becoming’ is intrinsic to the trans narrative because as I have previously noted trans identity can be located as an active verb as opposed to a static noun. Hormone therapy is one way that trans bodies are being brought into alignment with gender binaries through medical intervention. If a trans person that uses hormones were to stop then the effects deteriorate rather quickly, an example of one way that trans people are continuously becoming themselves through science.

The spaces are liminal because spaces under construction are easily queered. This quote further extrapolates what it means for a space to be queered:

“As Christopher Reed argues, ‘no space is totally queer or completely unqueerable... Queer space is space in the process of, literally, taking

place, of claiming territory.’ 17 This approach echoes queer theory’s challenges to normative views and envisions queer space as continually in the process of being constructed in opposition to heteronormativity, but also to broader prescriptive norms. As such, queer space is sometimes understood as encompassing any architecture that is odd or different, inspired by David Halperin’s definition of queer as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.” (Vallerand 65)

In the video I am queering the space just by being in it. In addition to my appearance, my use of public space as a site for performance accompanied by a film crew that records me dancing and moving erratically queers the space. I am using these spaces as an opportunity for celebration and excitement.

The choice to interact with spaces and architectural structures that are temporal speaks to the ways in which trans and non-binary identities blur boundaries are contingent upon occupying the space in-between. Specifically, the two different types of scaffolding that I interact with in the video echo the idea of becoming. The scaffolding in itself is a sort of in-between architecture, a structure built to preserve or sustain another structure or to allow bodies to travel safely through a site that is uprooted and in chaos. The scaffolding with the imagery of a lush forest created a faux ecosystem, or a space within a space, that seemed to be at odds with its surroundings. The pseudo natural environment and plant matter exist as a symbolic, temporary oasis in contrast to the city erected in the service of creating downtown condos. Fuck for Forests is a non-profit that promotes public sex explains tactics for breaking down the nature/culture binary:

“Our goal is to save nature, but it is also important to show the beauty of natural sex and sexuality. We believe that through a better relationship to our spiritual and sexual body, we can change the reality around us... We believe that humanity’s bad relationship to sexuality has a lot in common with the destroying of nature.... We felt sexuality was treated like nature, with disrespect. So why not use pure, open-minded sexuality to put focus on this unnatural way of treating this planet? (FFF 2007)” (Bell 135)

By performing in this space, I challenge the binary of nature/culture and assert trans bodies in-line with other bodies, human and non-human.

The video engages the politics of claiming space as a queer person. The sound in the video presents disapproving and scolding voices from bystanders as I perform in public spaces. My camera person is told that I am seen as a ‘liability’ and a ‘sideshow’ for entering a public space in non-normative attire. There is a resistance on the part of regulatory forces towards my own agency and, there is a resistance in response to my taking up space in public as a hypervisible queer person. Although the sculpture worn in this scene is extreme, the mocking and sense of danger is a reality for trans people in public space that is often seen as absurdist or comical.

The pink scene, however, transpires in a private bathroom to challenge normative regimes against trans people (Figure 8). This scene is an intentional reference to the current trans-political legislation that is taking place in the United States. The legislation changes regulate, penalize, and criminalize people with non-normative or non-binary gender. The close up of my nude body with one of the sculptures along with a voice recording saying “it’s a huge liability issue for us” is a way of underscoring that even in private queer and trans bodies are seen as dangerous or transgressive. The space of a private bathroom as a site for re-claiming self-pleasure is a nod to public washrooms that were once and sometimes still are sites of queer cruising. Apart from being locations for queer sexual interactions for trans people bathrooms symbolize public invisibility as there literally is no bathroom for non-binary people.

Chapter 7

Body vs. Mind Binaries

This MRP challenges the body/mind division that is prevalent in discourses surrounding trans people. The prevailing narrative for trans-folk as being, -born-into-the-wrong-body, paints an image that trans people have a mind that is in direct opposition to the rest of their physicality.

“The body is assumed wrong in relation to an inner, real, and authentic gender identity, thus giving the impression of an essence that the body constrains, producing a reified image of both body and self as static and separate entities and thereby correlating an essentialism of genital materiality that disputes the realness of transgender experience”

(Ulrica 267)

Trans- people are commonly challenged to prove their identity by providing supplemental documentation such as a birth certificate or state issued I.D., demonstrating another layer of regulatory systems to reify the dominance of binary gender. While medical practitioners assign gender at birth based on a series of visual observations, the rest of one’s life is dictated by the state and provincial bureaucratic systems, which force trans people to defend or reject their gender several times daily. This project dismantles the limitations of the body and mind binary and focuses on spectacles of the abject body to expose that such boundaries are socially constructed and oppressive.

The video celebrates occupying an in-between state of being and refuses to be categorized as is exemplified by the use of time-editing. The trans human voice, similar to hair, is an indicator of recognizable physical changes brought about by hormone therapy. Voice bridges the gap between language and the mind and is a major marker of social development and interaction. Voices can be seen as a bridge between the individual and the collective;

“Trans voices can fail to make sense in spectacular ways when our voices no longer provide adequate evidence for the bodies that emit them.*

In those spectacular failures, our ghostly utterances, we find the forms of resistance that beckon from the future of transgender studies.”(Anastasia 263)

YouTube has popularized the convention of transition videos where trans people record their voice changing over a period of time. The videos utilize time lapse effects in post-production as a way of synthesizing and dramatizing the effect of their transition. The video uses fast forward and slow motion voice techniques in a similar way. The YouTubers serve as another example of trans agency in representation and manipulation of time visually. The YouTubers conceptualize time as in relation to their bodies and fast-forward through the process of transitioning with an end goal of ‘passing’ and looking ‘normal’ in the eyes of the majoritarian class. The video celebrates abnormality and emphasizes the unstable nature of identity. Our lives as humans are precarious in comparison to the earth or ecosystems we are only a blip on the radar. Our bodies, as trans bodies, are especially fragile and normative culture such as these YouTubers, want to deny our unstable identity in favor of stable homonormativity. My video insists on being vulnerable, unsafe, and in-between.

In the video, I interact with the sculpture as an extension of the body, to subvert body-gender relationships. In the pink scene I perform in a masturbatory action that is intentionally confrontational and overtly sexual. Here, I mix sexual characteristics and ideas about gender performance and sexuality when I fellate the sculpture while the audio states “they don’t produce sperm.” (Figure 8). Some trans feminine or intersexed people have penises that don’t produce sperm. This visual combined with the audio questions ‘what it means to be a man.’ The audio intentionally undercuts traditional masculinity conventions of sexual prowess and what is considered natural or biological. There is a

feminizing of masculinity that occurs with the assault on the idea that a man cannot perform his biological imperative and procreate. This scene insists on sex for the sake of pleasure despite many religious arguments that insist on sex as a means of procreation and therefore discounting queer relationships as deviant.

Chapter 8

Animal vs. Human Binaries

Non-human animals have been burdened with the task of acting allegorically in political movements or as a way of elucidating truth about the nature of humans. It is common to point to the ways animals behave as a blueprint for what is considered natural or correct. Trans-animality appropriates scientific rhetoric and uses the same symbolism as a way of pointing towards the queering of humans based on evolutionary biologics that are decidedly queer. Trans-ness exists in relation to other beings. The condition or encounter occurs on many micro-levels through the course of a day or lifetime. Much like Butler's idea of gender as a series of acts, gender shifts based on how we participate.

Instead of looking to queer animals as a cautionary tale perhaps we can look to ways in which their non-heteronormative behaviors and appearances have served them positively and then consider ways humans could be more 'animal'. At the very least, the individualism that plagues our daily lives could be re-imagined in a way that puts more emphasis on collective action. We all share in the responsibility to unite in the common struggle to be in harmony with those around us, including non-human animals and their ecosystems:

"Because most of us are not familiar with the species, and with the diverse patterns of DNA mixing and reproduction they embody, our struggles to understand humans (and especially human dilemmas about 'sex', 'gender' and 'sexual orientation') are impoverished ... Shouldn't a fish whose gonads can be

first male, then female, help us to determine what constitutes 'male' and 'female'? Should an aphid fundatrix ('stem mother') inform our ideas about 'mother'? There on the rose bush, she neatly copies herself, depositing minuscule, sap-siphoning, genetically identical daughters. Aphids might lead us to ask not 'why do they clone?' but 'why don't we?' Shouldn't the long-term female homosexual pair bonding in certain species of gulls help define our views of successful parenting, and help [us] reflect on the intersection of social norms and biology? [2001, 197] (Hird 229)

Many people are unaware that there are many ways that animals procreate and engage in sexual activity that is not heterosexual. For example, while explaining my research to a colleague I received this common response: 'this non-binary stuff is all well and good, but at the end of the day, don't you still need a man and a woman to procreate?' My answer was a resounding no! I asked her if she had ever heard of cloning or a-sexual reproduction, or in-vitro fertilization. My colleague's perception of procreation was limited to the human realm.

This MRP encourages humans to look at the productive possibilities of trans and non-binary animals. In the final scene of the video the voice over says "All we are is just another species" to direct the viewer toward a future fashion system that innovates and adapts to the changing world. As species designations often shift, gender and fashion systems can move away from female/male binaries.

Trans-animality or comparisons between trans people and non-human animals is a burgeoning field of inquiry. There are several examples of animals that change their sexual characteristics over the course of their lifetimes or who present as one sex for part of their lifespan and transition to present as the opposite sex later on. In addition, there has been a history of intentionally suppressing such instances on the part of the scientific community in order to maintain hetero-normativity.

“[...] researchers constantly provide alibis and excuses for the same-sex sexual behavior that they observe but he also discovers that most researchers do not actually know the sex of the animal they are observing and so they imply sex based upon behavior and relational sets. This has led to all kinds of misreporting on heterosexual courtship because the sex of the creatures in question is not actually scrutinized and mixed sex couples, as with the albatrosses, very often end up being same sex couples” (“Animal Sociality Beyond the hetero/homo Binary” 325)

Heteronormative ideals are projected onto the animal world and in turn, obscure facts and knowledge about the diversity of sex and gender found in non-human animals.

In my video, I have chosen three images to represent the three scenes; a tiger, frog and jellyfish for formal and conceptual reasons. The animal images correspond mostly with the color of the costumes in each scene and help to mark the various segments in relation to theory. The video draws comparisons to ways in which non-human animals can be queer and trans while pointing to ways in which queer and trans people connect with non-human animals. For instance, trans feminine people who inject Premarin to physically change their body chemistry are injecting hormones obtained from pregnant cows.

The first animal representation is a tiger made of lights that relates to concepts of hypervisibility and biological determinism. The tiger is exaggerated in scale and color, hypervisible as a public monument. The tiger’s bright orange lights relate to the hypervisibility of the construction vests worn by myself and workers in the first scene.

“Considering that Andrew N. Sharpe (2010: 88) has identified the transsexual body, in terms of Foucault’s definition of monstrosity, as “a double breach of law and nature,” the hybrid body, in the picture, defies human ideas of a fixed binary nature, while the confrontational visibility of its monstrosity defies the unwritten law of invisibility which demands that the “unnatural,” the abnormal, has to hide or be destroyed, else it threatens the “natural” order. This invisibility was enforced through stigmatization and violence...” (Wagner 342)

In the video both myself and the tiger are hypervisible. As mentioned previously, the idiom ‘a tiger can’t change his stripes’ corresponds to ideas of biological essentialism in the animal and human worlds. Biological essentialism enforces the superiority of physicality and science over self -knowledge. Sari M. Van Anders reframes biology from a trans vantage point: “bio/logics” (B/L): implicit and/or explicit reasoning guides informed by features thought to be natural, corporeal, evolved, and material (e.g., sex over gender). (Van Anders 33) My project subverts these logics in favor of the illogical or the absurd. The performances in the video encourage self-fulfillment through dance, make-up techniques, and prosthetics none of which must be controlled by science or medicine.

I chose a frog for the second animal because of its connections to sexual panic which I will discuss below and metaphors of normative love and romance. Initially, I chose the frog because of the bright green color but upon further research realized that the frog is rich with symbolic meaning. In the chapter “Polluted Politics Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Exonormativity” from the book *Queer Ecologies*. In this chapter Giovanna di Chiro outlines the rhetoric surrounding sexual panic regarding amphibians with mixed sexual characteristics:

“While the news of rising incidences of fish tumors, clam and mussel lesions, Beluga whale breast and ovarian cancers, and disappearing amphibians have attracted a following in environmentalist circles, the documentation of gender-bending, homosexual, and emasculated frogs, fish, birds, and alligators, has caught the attention of the mainstream media and blogosphere. (di Chiro 204)

This MRP elucidates ways that humans prioritize non-human animal stories only in so far as they relate to the wellbeing of human-kind. This project privileges queer narratives as important narratives and reasserts that as a part of the environment, we must be concerned with the future of other species. In addition, frogs, have an association with love or

romance, such as in fairytales or children's stories, when the princess must kiss a frog to turn him into a prince. The frog in such stories is compelling as it represents inter-species relations and corresponds to trans narratives while simultaneously reproducing heteronormative narratives.

The jelly fish was chosen as the third and final animal because of its malleable form that resists classification and is in continuous motion. The jellyfish in the video are constantly transitioning and appear to be generating and regenerating. They are also highly adaptable and change color on a spectrum that fluctuates. This relates to the way that gender is created and re-inscribed through the process of actions and exists in communities along a spectrum. The jelly fish is also a visual marker of homogeneity that incorporates difference. When one jellyfish starts to change color the rest follow but none of them are exactly the same shade.

Throughout the video the animals become progressively less relatable to human forms as a way of testing ideas about empathy and how humans situate themselves in relation to certain animals. First the viewer is asked to relate to the tiger which appears kind and friendly, next the viewer is asked to relate to frogs which are cute but less like humans, and finally to the amorphous jellyfish which seems otherworldly when compared to human bodies. The concept of cross-species identification is explained by Eva Hayward:

The trouble with identification ... is that it is a misalignment of empathy with the possibility of familiarity. Identification relies on extending empathy across similarity to dissimilarity, providing the identifying human with the authority of encounter. As such, the organism can only receive the benefits of empathy if we can identify with it. This might work well for charismatic megafauna—dogs, horses, cats, dolphins—that we can map our bodies onto, but for organisms like jellies [jellyfish] or coral or octopuses, the overwhelming bodily differences make identification a

politics of erasure rather than empathy. (“Alligator Earrings and the Fishhook in the Face” 266)

This project asks the viewer to extend empathy to the sculptural forms and by doing so also identify with the trans body. Even if the viewer is identifying negatively, they are relating themselves to the trans subject and forced to interrogate their own pre-established gender biases.

Intersexed humans have held an intermediary position throughout history and have been seen as ungodly or inhuman.

“Hermaphroditic bodies acted as an axis point at which the disputed boundaries between male and female, Christian and non-Christian, and European and foreigner converged. Medieval texts routinely depicted Jews and Muslims as hermaphroditic beings partaking in eating and sexual practices that aligned them with animals and, in effect, denied their humanity. Perhaps the greatest takeaway from this piece—and there are many from which to choose—is DeVun’s observation that in some contexts, “sexual difference is wrapped up in the very construction of taxonomies of human and nonhuman” (461). (Booth 356)

The idea that trans people are against nature also applies to the ways in which people thought about racialized bodies throughout history, including in the last century. The belief that racialized bodies were closer to animal or in some way primitive, is echoed in anti-trans perceptions. Here one can see the efforts in place by white supremacy and heterosexism to de-naturalize and pathologize other bodies in order to assert white, heterosexual dominance.

In addition to the video’s sound and images of animals, the wearable sculptures and the movements in the performances, engage the relationship between trans bodies and non-human animals. In the green scene, I am hopping around like a frog. In the pink scene my legs open and close, splayed in the air also like a frog. My movements in the orange

scene of thrashing around are fantastical and resemble the way a tiger might go after its prey.

This MRP sought to problematize binaries such as female/male, public/private, mind/body, and human/ animal. Throughout the development of the project additional binaries became apparent, such as internal/external, legal/illegal, trans/cis, stable/unstable, deviant/normative. These binaries warrant further investigation and creative exploration beyond the scope of this MRP.

Chapter 9

Artistic Influences

The sculptural forms in this project were influenced by a group of three women, loosely known as the eccentric abstractionists: Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, and Yayoi Kusama. The eccentric abstractionists' sculptural forms rely on repetition, personal narrative, and relationships to the body. Hesse responds in the quote below to a question about the use of repetition in the sculpture: "...because it exaggerates. If something is meaningful, maybe it's more meaningful said ten times. It's not just an aesthetic choice. If something is absurd, it's much more greatly exaggerated, absurd, if it's repeated." (Nemser 1970) (*In a Queer Time and Space* 122). This MRP echoes such sentiments by using multiple patterns and size variations on the floral fabric but creating similar forms and repeating them to the point of absurdity.

The video was influenced by performance aesthetics from the early 2000s, especially the work of video artists Ryan Trecartin and Laurel Nakadate. Both Nakadate and Trecartin use low-fi technology as a nod to D.I.Y., 90s performance aesthetics and as a

way of critiquing and framing their work in a post-internet milieu. This quote helps to situate and draw comparisons to the ways in which Trecartin's signature style has influenced the editing and pacing of this video:

"They manipulate the voices of their characters giving them an unnaturally high-pitched tone that Trecartin achieves by manipulating Auto-Tune. The cheap looking, amateurish visual style of their art is indeed a political statement... For Trecartin, it is a way to continue the conversation about the long established critique around the commercialization of television started by pioneer video artists, while remaining relatable to his populist, do-it-yourself YouTube audience."

(Zulletta 14)

This 'Auto-Tune' effect is highly produced the same way dominant anti-trans rhetoric emphasizes the 'produced' identity in trans people as opposed to natural identity.

This video also extends from the use of the body in the history of performance art. From a teleological perspective, early video works utilize performance as a way of documenting. This project builds from performance artists such as Marina Abramovic and Carolee Schneemann. Abramovic's early performances, such as *Rhythm 0*, in 1974 (Figure 10), are influential. In *Rhythm 0*, Abramovic was a passive participant and invited onlookers to engage with her body with any of the 72 objects placed on a table in front of her. Participants put a gun in her mouth, made her consume pills, and cut her clothes from her body as she filmed the ordeal. Carolee Schneemann's "Interior Scroll" (Figure 11) lyrically explores narrative and interiority. In this performance, Schneemann stood naked and removed a scroll from her vagina while reciting the written work on it. Trecartin's work adds layers of intersectionality inserting race and class into the discussion. Trecartin

also deals with the body utilizing drag techniques in the creation of characters that embodies the ideologies of sexuality, gender, class, and race.

The body has been an area of focus in trans studies because of sociological models that suggest that trans people were born into the wrong body or narratives surrounding biological essentialism as a defining characteristic of what it means to be a woman. Essentialism espouses that all women's bodies should have a vagina or a uterus. The trans- narrative subverts these expectations by proudly proclaiming womanhood regardless of genitalia. Nakadate explains how her work deals with video in a post-modern way:

"I think at this point, we are in the YouTube, Facebook generation, and it provides the outlet to be narcissistic. A lot of my early work was before YouTube and Facebook were popular - it was about a young girl trying to tell a story, and art was the navigational tool. The later work, like 365 Days, was a critique of the culture I live in. My work really spans the decade of technological development that I have emerged from and within, and it has been so influential on my outlook. Each performance artist has to speak for themselves, whether it's about narcissism or self-obsession. I don't see narcissism necessarily as a negative thing." (Weil 3)

Transgender identities have been noted as being uniquely post-modern because of the emphasis on technology as a means of augmenting our physical bodies ie. Surgeries and Hormone Therapy. This MRP engages with notions of self-fashioning or natural trans-ness created without the use of scientific intervention.

Leigh Bowery's use of fashion and extreme aesthetics have been a direct influence on this project specifically his performances of birth that often included his wife's participation. Bowery's birth series was especially impactful because it allowed the viewer to imagine queer birth narratives and familial dynamics that are outside of the homo-normative. Bowery wore costumes that would conceal his partner strapped to his

body. They would perform a camp undoing of labor and delivery often on stages in queer arenas at the height of the AIDS Crisis.

“Bowery’s brazen humor in the Birth Scenes treat gender, sexuality and reproduction as camp performance, in a hyperbolic, shocking reveal of abject female bodies. Caryl Flinn describes an excessive abject camp, called ‘body camp’, which revels in caricatures so extreme that the loaded grotesquerie undoes any notion of naturalized gender.” (Galvin 197)

This radical performance aesthetic relates to my project because Bowery was showing how gender and the body are unstable while at the same time queering birth.

Christeene is an underground drag performer. Christeene’s performances critique and poke fun at homonormativity within the queer community. Christeene’s performance art relies on the abject and the grotesque. Their drag aesthetic is ugly, confrontation, and scatological. The celebrity persona she embodies is pop-culture on acid and resists co-optation. They take the regular pop-star formula and make it queer and naked and disgusting. Christeene explains the specific trans moment she is responding to:

“The queer and trans community is in a very shifting place right now. We’re getting acceptance but then we’re getting married. Assimilation and a hetero-normativity are being embraced right now. It’s good for many people, but at the same time the counter-culture must come back. We must thrive in the secret places, in the woods.” (Ramaswamy 1)

Christeene’s work is unapologetically counterculture even though she has collaborated with mega fashion brands like Rick Owens. Mainstreaming is not a concern for Christeene because she is continually reasserting the value of the underground. My project is abject in similar ways and uses fashion as a way of blurring the boundaries of the body much like her drag does.

Conclusion

This MRP is a humble beginning in a quest to merge fashion studies scholarship and non-binary expression and representation. Further research would delve into the ways that trans-animality overlaps with issues of race, class, and privilege. Trans scholars have a responsibility to help cultivate databases for trans-histories in order to maintain a coherent narrative of the past by and for trans people. Non-western conceptions can be used to show how relatively new such binary conceptions of gender are throughout history and to trace the overwhelming overlap between colonization and gender persecution.

Fashion explorations could include construction techniques of patterning and fabricating garments that consider the complexities of the trans body. Using other materials such as leather, fur, or feathers would carry a more literal approach to the trans animal relationships. At a more pragmatic level, one can question how can garments be made specifically for clients that have changing needs or wardrobes that need to be transitional? Interviews and more in-depth scholarship that allows for trans authorship and self-representation is clearly needed. Trans histories of communication and nuanced codes of secret community building need to be preserved and cataloged.

The vision for the future of non-binary fashion imagines futures where queer bodies seize control of their own narratives. One way that we have agency is through the way that we dress and self-fashion our bodies to present to the social world. Representation needs to exist for future generations to want to strive towards a broader, queerer and more inclusive trans future. If we can look to ways that other species adapt and change, hopefully we can learn to treat our planet and each-other with greater respect and inclusivity. Producing this video has helped me to realize just how tenuous and fragile the trans body is and perhaps how this fragility can be embraced as a tactic for relating to other humans. If

vulnerability is a jumping off point then there might be a greater ability to trans-together in order to preserve the future of our tenuous ecosystems. This project has shown me that I am part of the environment and that its fate is intimately linked to my own. I've learned that trans voices are few but that they are loud and work in harmony with one another and the voices of non-human animals to seek solutions for community building. The end-game is connection whether it is through fashion, performance, or art.

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Appendix

Figure 1. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 2. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 3. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 4. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 5. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*

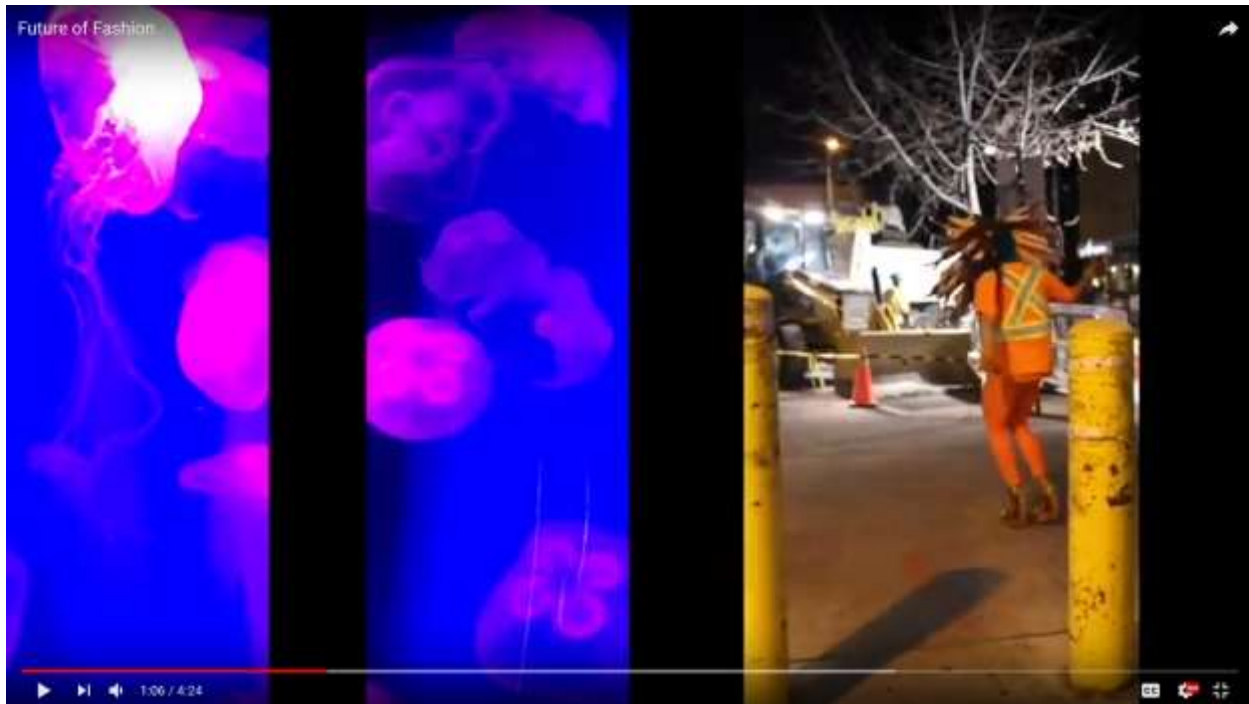


Figure 6. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 7. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 8. *Trans Animal Fashion Futures*



Figure 9. Yayoi Kusama, *Boat*



Figure 10. Marina Abramovic, *Rhythm 0*



Figure 11. Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*



Figure 12. Laurel Nakadate, *365 Days of Tears*



Figure 13. Ryan Trecartin, *Any-Ever*



Figure 14. Leigh Bowery, *Birth*



Figure 15. Christeene, *Butt Muscle*

