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A performative exploration of gender, transformation and identity

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Abstract

In this thesis I present artistic research of my own performance art. I explore my identity and gender and look at how I performatively transform. I do this twofold: From an autoethnographic standpoint in relation to my performance of my identity in daily life, as well as in the form of artistic research. The artistic research consists of my artwork and its preparations, which is the practical part of the thesis. I reflect upon other artists' work as a part of this process, as well. I use critical gender theory and queer phenomenology as the main sources in my artistic research. These theories also function as theoretical tools to analyse my own work. I'm looking at what types of expectations and norms society has imposed upon me and my body, while simultaneously pursuing the project to challenging these norms by trying to navigate the world and create my own path.

Abstrakt

I denne oppgaven presenteres et kunstnerisk utviklingsarbeid i form av min performancekunst. Her utforsker jeg identitet og kjønn, og hvordan jeg performativt transformerer. Dette gjør jeg todelt: Fra et autoetnografisk utgangspunkt i forhold til min performance av identiteten min i hverdagen, samt i form av en kunstnerisk utforskningsprosess. Den kunstneriske utforskningsprosessen består av mine kunstneriske arbeid, som er den praktiske delen av masteroppgaven, samt dens forarbeider. Jeg reflekterer også rundt andre kunstnere sitt arbeid også, som en del av prosessen. Jeg bruker kritisk kjønnsteori og skeiv fenomenologi som hovedkilder til denne utforskningsprosessen. Teoriene fungerer som teoretiske verktøy for å analysere eget arbeid. Jeg ser dermed på hva samfunnet har pålagt meg og min kropp av forventninger, og bryter med disse, samtidig som jeg streber etter å utfordre disse forventningene ved å navigere verden og lage min egen vei.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

An individual perceived as a woman sits in the middle of the frame close to the camera. They are white and leaning their face on their hand. Having a rounder face and hand, one may assume the subject is fat. They have hair that is parted on the side and the length of the hair reaches their shoulders. Wearing a blue fuzzy sweater having eye contact with the camera. The facial expression is mostly relaxed. The ring finger has a visible marking where a ring may have been. The entire video is tinted in a blue aesthetic, however, keeping some of the warmth in the face and skin. The background is dark and even. During the video performance, the subject sits in the same position, quite still. You can see the subject breathing, swallowing at times and becoming emotional in waves. However, no tears shed down the face. The eyes are sometimes slightly filled with tears and then dry up again.

(A formal analysis of the performance video *r i n g* – from chapter: 5.2.1 *r i n g*)

1.1 Theme

In this master's thesis I explore my gender identity and expression and how I transform them performatively. This is done from a performative autoethnographic standpoint, based on the performance of my gender identity in daily life, as well as in the form of artistic research. The artistic research consists of my artwork and its preparations, which is the practical part of the thesis. I reflect upon other artists' work as a part of this process, as well. I use Judith Butler's books *Gender Trouble* (2006) and *Bodies That Matter* (2011) as the main sources in my artistic research. These books also function as theoretical tools to analyse my own work alongside Sarah Ahmed's book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Thus, I'm looking at what types of expectations and norms society has imposed upon me and my body, while simultaneously pursuing the project to challenging these norms by trying to navigate the world and create my own path. This is done by using *Queer Phenomenology* as a tool to reflect upon how I navigated it all.

1.2 Objective

My goal is twofold: I aim that the heteronormative audience will reflect upon the oppression queer people face in society. I hope my work will achieve this through the observer's feelings, to create more tolerance, acceptance and understanding, which will hopefully

contribute to political change. At the same time, I hope the queer audience and/or people who are gender nonconforming will feel seen by my work. Maybe they can finally put their feelings into words? I also want to normalize exploration and experimentation of gender expression. We live in a society where teenagers can explore their identity quite bold (within the heteronormative norms). They can easily explore bold hair colours, listen to alternative music and consume media other generations find challenging. And luckily society is starting to let children and teenagers test out different pronouns and names without the pressure to change them forever. Personally, I find this not being the case for adults. I hope my thesis will show the youth that it is okay to explore, it doesn't have to feel like a huge decision. But I also want to show adults the same. It's never too late to feel free, take ownership of your own expression and identity. Even though society may give you a hard time doing so, more and more individuals are challenging this and you are not alone.

1.3 Problem Statement

My problem statement for this thesis is as following:

How can a performative exploration of gender contribute to transform my own identity?

The main way I plan to explore my problem statement is through a timeline. In this timeline I have created three separate lines: One about my transformation in my everyday life where my thoughts, reflections, actions and objects I gravitate towards are highlighted. A second line about my artistic performative work. Here I look at my own work such as performance videos and live performances. The third line is the artistic research other artists' work. However, I do not analyse their work, but they have influenced me and my own work. Simultaneously, I ask questions through how some of them relate to me and my work. I also use work by Judith Butler and Sarah Ahmed to explore my identity performatively and analyse my work.

2.0 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND THEORY

2.1 Terms

2.1.1 Gender expression

Gender expression is the way someone's gender is presented to the world. This through visual symbols such as appearance, clothing, haircuts etc. Someone's gender expression is

also based on their behaviour, interests, mannerisms, body language, gender roles and how they speak. How others perceive others gender expression today is heavily based on the binary gender system. Usually, these symbolic meanings are within the categories of femininity or masculinity, especially in the western part of society.

2.1.2 Pronouns

Throughout my reflections upon my artistic work, I use different pronouns to refer to myself as a subject, in the work. This does not reflect my own gender identity, at the moment the work was created nor today. Not to mention, pronouns do not necessarily reflect someone's gender identity. On the contrary, I use different pronouns in the analysis, to refer to the way a potential observer and society may interpret my gender. This based on the gender norms in the western world. A society where the norm is to assume people's gender and pronouns based on what symbols they have/use. What type of symbols do I, the subject, use in the work? What symbolic meaning do my sex characteristics, my body, hold for a potential observer? And what symbolic meaning can I apply by choice when it comes to expression? How others interpret my artistic work will therefore heavily depend on how the subject is perceived. Throughout the thesis I use she, he and they pronouns in different analysis.

2.1.3 Passing

Passing is a term, used in the context of gender and sex, as a way of explaining how others perceive someone's gender based on gender and sex characteristics, as well as gender expression. For example, someone with the gender identity of a transgender man may be either perceived as a cisgender woman or a cisgender man. Someone may even be androgynous in such a way making it differ in different situations. Maybe someone has the knowledge of gender being on a spectrum, making them perceive the subject as non-binary. On the other hand, this may confuse the observer, hence we live in a binary western world, making them be uncertain of the subject's gender identity and pronouns.

2.1.5 Fatness

I want to clarify that I will be using the term *fat* in this thesis. I will not use big as it is not specific enough. Overweight and obese are medical terms that describe that there is something wrong with the body, I will therefore not use these terms either. Lastly, I will not use plus size. However, I want to acknowledge that some people like and use this term. Thus,

it's true origin is to suggest that the "normal" section in clothing stores is the preferred place to be and segregates fat people from the rest of the store. I use the word *fat* to describe myself, as it is simply a descriptive word. Just like tall or short. However, this is still a discussion among fat folks. Some prefer not to use the word fat, and that is their choice. Fat is sometimes used in a derogatory way. However, many fat people want to reclaim it as it is truly just a descriptive word by origin. Fat is also used in the terms *Fatphobia* as well as in *The Fat Liberation Movement* which is the backbone to the movement most people know today as *The Body Positive Movement*. Lastly, I want to clarify that I am queer, fat, and white.

2.2 Theoretical Backdrop

2.2.1 Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw used the term *intersectionality* for the first time in the paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination, Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* in 1989 (Columbia Law School, 2017). In an interview, Crenshaw defined intersectionality as the following:

«Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.»
(Columbia Law School, 2017).

In this paper Crenshaw argued that race was excluded from feminist theory as a factor. By bringing this to the light, Crenshaw showed that only white women's discrimination was highlighted under the patriarchy. Giving only privileges to white women in the feminist fight and further upheld the oppression of Black women. Crenshaw even argued that Black women's exclusion from feminist theory gave further privileges to white women over them. Contributing to further domination by white women over Black women (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139-167). In Crenshaw's conclusion she argues that for the movement to be beneficial in general, the focus should be on the most marginalized women:

«It is somewhat ironic that those concerned with alleviating the ills of racism and sexism should adopt such a top-down approach to discrimination. If their efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most

disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit. [...]The goal of this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: "When they enter, we all enter."» (Crenshaw, 1989, p.167).

Intersectionality, today, is well known in the feminist movement. The term has been used by many in gender studies, especially in the 2000's. Many use the term today to refer to different social categories, and how they can overlap, such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexual orientation and disabilities (Thun, 2023). In light of my work, I look at how categories such as women, fat-, queer-, gender non-conforming- and trans* people can overlap.

2.2.2 Feminist Performance Art in USA During the 70s

Kaylee Simonson highlights that performance art was a great tool in the feminist movement during the 70s, in the study on feminist performance art *Radical Joy Performed into Action: A Study of Feminist Performance Art* (2018):

“The art world is no exception to this; it has been a traditionally male-dominated arena, including the emergence of radical performance art that rose in opposition to traditional art culture. It was the changing socio political landscape of the 1960s and 70s that sparked the use of performance art by feminists as a personal and political tool.” (Simonson, 2018, p.4).

Donna Schons highlights multiple performance artists and their importance for feminist performance in the article *The Performance Artists Who Made Feminist History* (2017) in *Sleek Magazine*. Schons point out that performance artist Carolee Schneemann brought up the topic of shameless sexuality in her performances *Meat Joy* (1964) and *Interior Scroll* (1975). Here, using her naked body as the art material. Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964), an iconic feminist performance, where she shed light on the violence and aggression towards the female body, as well as the way women we are conditioned to be passive. The Cuban-American artist, Ana Mendieta, played with gender roles in her performance *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)* (1972). Mendieta also brought up topics such as rape, violence and murder

against women in her performances (Schons, 2017). Mendieta also criticized the feminist movement, saying it did not include women of colour:

“they failed to remember us. American Feminism as it stands is basically a white middle class movement” (Simonson, 2018, p. 16).

Schons also shows how influential Schneemann, Wilke, Marina Abramovic and Valerie Export, were for feminist performance art. Ono and Mendieta are the only women of colour being mentioned by Schons. However, at this time, white and middle-class women were not the only type of women taking up space. These women had also one other thing in common: They are all thin.

I’ve personally searched to find fat feminist performance artist from this time, but failed to find anyone. However, I found Charlotte Cooper. A Live Artist, a psychotherapist and fat. In the writing *Tantalising Glimpses: A LADA Study Room Guide on Fat* (2020), Cooper says fat people are excellent for performance art:

«Live Artists love to get their kit off and fat people have an advantage in being easily able to make a spectacle of ourselves because our bodies are idiosyncratic and non-conforming. [...] Live Artists are contrarians who love all the things that normal people find uncomfortable. In the opposite land of Live Art things that are grotesque, weird, horrifying, bizarre and wrong are things in which we find beauty and power. Nail your scrotum to a board? Check. Bleed all over the floor? Love it. Get someone to shoot you? Yes please. Arrange your body fluids in jars? Heaven. The Normals really hate fat people so what could be more Live Art than to bring it to people's attention?» (Cooper, 2020, p.6).

2.2.3 Fat Phobia

Sabrina String gives a deep understanding of where fat phobia stems from in her book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* (2019). Strings traces the origins of fat phobia to the slave trade. Therefore, highlighting fat phobia being rooted in eugenics and racism. In her book she shows how integrated fat phobia is in society. Bringing the reader through the renaissance until today. Showing the reader how the beauty standards were quite different during the renaissance. At this time, fatness was a sign of wealth, status and health.

The time period was filled of painted women with curves and bellies (some may argue fat; however, fatness can be subjective and is on a continuum/scale). The slave trade was done in the name of Christianity, this linking fat phobia to Christianity. At this time, thinness was seen as pure and was considered to be a quality someone had because they were in control (Strings, 2019).

Strings highlights many medical men from the eighteenth-century that linked dieting and thinness to spirituality. Being modest and thin went hand in hand. And seventeenth-century men had linked thinness to reason and intellect saying black people lacked self-control and were savage, and therefore fat. (Strings, 2019). In my opinion, this book shows how important intersectionality is. When we see that fatness is connected to racism, class and capitalism (being more financially privileged white men have set up these fatphobic ideas), it shows that dismantling one systemic problem can not be done without acknowledging the others.

These intersectionalities have been known by fat feminist activists for years. The manifesto from 1973, *Fat Liberation Manifesto* by Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran addressed this in one of their points: “3. WE see our struggle as allied with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, financial exploitation, imperialism and the like.” (Freespirit, Aldebaran, 1973).

2.2.4 Dissensus

Jaques Rancière's writes about a term *dissensus* in several of his writings. In *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010), *dissensus* is described as: «The essence of politics is dissensus. Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself.» (Rancière, 2010, p.38).

According to Rancière there is a relationship between politics, art and *dissensus*: «Art and politics each define a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible.» (Rancière, 2010, p.140). I interpret Rancière's definition of *dissensus* as a phenomenon that occurs when a *gap* emerges within ourselves and the world. As he says, it's not the difference in opinions, but rather this *gap* in what makes sense. In an arena in which discussion and disagreement occurs, dissensus can be the result. In other words, maybe it is the difference in how art is perceived and sensed?

Rancière also brings up a term he calls *aesthetic distance*: «aesthetic distance, which does not consist in the ecstatic contemplation of the beautiful and thereby work mischievously to conceal the social underpinnings of art and dispense with concrete action in the 'outside' world.» (Rancière, 2010, p.137). Maybe Rancière is trying to convey that art, which is not sensed as stereotypically beautiful or aesthetically pleasing, may have a higher chance in achieving change? If the intentions or message behind the art itself is hidden by an *aesthetic distance*, perhaps it can make us question what we are sensing to such a degree that we question ourselves, our thoughts, beliefs, and perhaps even the world?

In Rancière's book *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), he states: «Dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering the coordinates of the shared world» (Rancière, 2009, p.49). Maybe, Rancière is trying to convey that art should strive to redefine our established conceptions of ourselves and the world around us. Perhaps art should aim to do so through our senses. Rancière also states that: «Images change our gaze and the landscape of the possible if they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects.» (Rancière, 2009, p.105). It might be feasible that Rancière is trying to convey that art can achieve political change by not being easily defined, when the intention behind the art is not obvious. Perhaps, rather plant a seed within the observer to reflect. Maybe ask bigger questions, that may rattle their sense of self?

This might also be interesting to apply to words and how they are sensed. When looking at different political discourses in society, and not in the context of sensing art alone. One example could be the word *fat*. Personally, I have met many who use the word *fat* as just a descriptor, like short or tall. As I personally do. While others find the word as a slur and equivalent to ugly, lazy and/or dumb. This is again highlighted as a strong stance about fat people by Strings, as I showed earlier.

It is interesting to me how *dissensus* may occur when two people try to discuss fatphobia. Two people are using the same word, *fat*. However, because these two may have two entirely separate definitions of *fat*, the discussion intensifies, creating the *gap in the sensible*. Even

the word fatphobia itself I have found creates such a gap when I use the term with others. And when Rancière points out that the manifestation of this *gap* is strongly linked to the political, may the *gap in the sensible* be the solution? Can a difficult conversation, where two people are speaking, in theory about the same word, however seem to talk in two different directions be the essence for genuine political change?

2.2.5 Affect

Lise Hovik wrote in her article about different definitions of affect, titled: *Ulike definisjoner av begrepet «affekt» og dets anvendelsesområde: Begrepets betydning for samtidens scenekunst og -kommunikasjon* (2020), which can be translated as: *Different Definitions of the Term “Affect” and Its Area of Application: The Term’s Significance for Contemporary Performing Arts and Communication* (2020). In this article affect is defined, etymologically, as to be empathetic, to be moved, to make an impression on, to be influenced by and to be affected by (Hovik, 2020, p. 72). Psychologically, affect is defined as a strong, but short lived, emotion or mood change (Hovik, 2020, p. 73). According to Hovik, Brian Massumi describes affect as bodily autonomous intensities. Affect is processes that take place outside of our consciousness, are automatic and are like a reflex and are not necessarily strongly connected to our subjective emotions (Hovik, 2020, p. 76).

2.3 Performance

2.3.1 Performing in Everyday Life

According to Richard Schechner, in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013): “All actors are performers, but not all performers are actors. In theory, one can specify the difference between actors and performers. But in practice these differences are in the process of collapsing.” (Schechner, 2013, p. 208). Schechner further explains that the actors repeat certain roles, made by others, in front of an audience. The audience is well aware that the actors are pretending to be someone else. While a performer of a sport is not pretending to be someone else. However, they are performing with a certain focus as well as publicly displaying themselves and are therefore *performing*. Schechner also points out that the athlete may become famous and their presentation of self publicly becomes character acting (Schechner, 2013, p. 208).

In addition, Schechner brings up that people perform in everyday life. Sometimes alone or with others, behind closed doors, in a small group or a part of a bigger crowd (Schechner, 2013, p. 208). Schechner goes further into performing in everyday life, with examples:

“Sometimes the scenario of everyday life uses consciously enacted conventional behaviours, as at a formal dinner party or a funeral; sometimes the scenario of everyday life is loose, as when you are walking down the street in casual conversation with a friend. Most of daily living is taken up by performing job, professional, family and social roles. Each of these, in every culture, comes equipped with ways of behaving and interacting. Everyone masters to some degree or another the social codes of daily life. Rebels intentionally break the rules; revolutionaries want to change them permanently.” (Schechner, 2013, p. 208).

When reflecting upon everyday life and how much of our lives is a performance, one might question if anything really is not a performance? When do we not perform? When we sleep? Asking myself these questions makes me contemplate upon how many factors, besides gender, are a construction. Giving us different unwritten rules that influence different sets of rituals that we repeat. And seeing how these codes and rituals are so ingrained into our everyday life. One truly has to be a rebel to break and challenge them. Can my research be a tiny part of a larger revolution to change these permanently?

Schechner argues that social behaviour, in general, is a construct:

“Social behaviour is constructed. The matter is complicated because the assertion, “Now I am performing” is often met by another equally insistent assertion, “The role I am playing is me.” So where or who is the “real me”? The rules of behaviour are obvious with regard to established roles such as “mother”, “doctor,” “teacher,” “child,” and so on. The specific gestures, tones of voice, costume, and such, appropriate to many social roles are well known.” (Schechner, 2013, p. 209).

If all interactions we have are performative, even behind closed doors, as well as when we are alone. Then, performativity in everyday life extends massively and is more complex than one might think. Can even a small change, alone, in my bathroom, be a revolutionary act of changing the constructions and codes of social behaviour and gender in society at large?

2.3.2 The Transformative Power of Performance

In the light of my work many may say I am on a path to injure my body. Cutting my hair or growing a moustache may seem harmless. But navigating the world, in such an androgynous way is exposing myself to harm in society. One may also argue that wearing a chest binder, a compression vest that can only be worn 5 days in a row, for only 8 hours at a time, is not a harmless act. Not only can it expose me to harm from others in everyday life (if the binder does only make me more androgynous, rather than help me pass), but it can cause back and/or spine pain, bruised ribs (or in severe cases fractured ribs and a misaligned spine) and breast tissue can be damaged permanently. Though binding within the guidelines is safe, there's still a risk I take by using this binder in everyday life. The theme of the performance artist exposing oneself to harm can be read in Erika Fischer-Lichte's book *The Transformative Power of Performance – A New Aesthetics*, 2008:

“On the one hand, tricks that would “normally” lead to serious injuries miraculously seem not to harm the artists themselves, such as fire eating, sword swallowing, or piercing the tongue with a needle, to name only a few. On the other hand, the artists perform extremely hazardous actions, exposing themselves to real dangers. The mastery of the performers lies precisely in their ability to defy this danger.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 14).

As mentioned, I do expose myself to real dangers from others in society (even though many are accepting of gender non-conforming individuals, many are not). We do know that trans and gender non-conforming people are subjects to violence. Butler goes into this in *Bodies That Matter* (2022), especially in the chapter *Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion*, where they bring up the death of Venus Xtravaganza in the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1991)(Butler, 2011, p. 81-97). However, maybe the harm in my transformative performance is defied, by transforming in such a way that brings me joy in life? Maybe, the harm is defied by following gender euphoria? Maybe, the harm is defied by following the guidelines for binding safely? Maybe, the harm is defied by doing the transformation? By being a visual gender non-conforming person in a society that says that I should not exist? That is quite the accomplishment. Maybe, just maybe, I can allow others to do the same. Maybe, I can be joyful, brave and let others feel seen.

Another point in Fischer-Lichtes book is the reaction from the audience. Or in my work in everyday life - society:

“This is the moment the audience fears most and which it yet feverishly awaits. Its deepest fears, fascination, and sensationalist curiosity are unleashed in this moment. These spectacles are not so much about the transformation of the actors or, even less so, the spectators. They rather seek to demonstrate the unusual physical and mental powers of the performers, and are intended to elicit awe and wonder from the audience.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 14).

As you, the reader, is an observer (or even a voyager of my exploration of gender) your feelings of fear and fascination might come to fruition by my work. I get to go through a transformation, but at what cost? As Marina Abramovic performed *Rhythm 0* (1974), she exposed herself to danger directly from the audience by asking them to participate in using different objects on her body (Schons, 2017). They do in the end intervene and stop the performance. However, they were also inflicting harm upon her being perpetrators of violence. I don't plan, at this point, to ask the audience to actively participate, in this way, during my final exhibition. Nevertheless, I question whether or not I can escape this in my everyday life.

Fischer-Lichte also says the following:

“In effect, objects and actions are no longer dependent on the meanings attributed to them. As events that reveal these special characteristics, artistic performance opens up the possibility for all participants to experience a metamorphosis.” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 23).

Perhaps my art can create some form of reflections about violence, in some way. If the audience can contemplate on the fact that I, the subject, has to walk into a store, in my everyday life and being androgynous. And therefore, being a subject to societies gaze, and perhaps violence. Maybe we all can experience a metamorphosis, for the better, together.

2.4 Judith Butler

I have chosen to also use Judith Butler's books *Gender Trouble* (2006) and *Bodies That Matter* (2011) in my thesis. Butler argues that our bodies do not determine our behaviour when it comes to gender roles. They write about how those of us who do not conform to gender roles are suppressed by society or *hegemonic culture*. This power structure dominates how subjects (people) behave, learning to fit in. They introduce the term *gender performativity*, in *Gender Trouble*, arguing gender is an act and a performance. We walk, talk, express (dress, use symbols) and behave according to our gender, and repeat this in our lives (Butler, 2006).

Further they say that society regards someone's gender based on their performance. This to please societies expectations. Subjects perform gender showing us that gender is a construction. *The heteronormative matrix* is also used as a term to explain this phenomenon as a wider force in our society (Butler, 2006). This book brings up questions within me: What roles, acts, expressions, symbols and type of body language are performative? What type of body characteristics do we gender, in what way, and are they limiting?

Bodies That Matter (2011) brings up performativity again. Trying to further explore what it truly means beyond *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 2011). This is highlighted by Butler, as the following:

“There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that is it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed. The “performance” dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constrain is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity.” (Butler, 2011, p. 59-60).

Perhaps, Butler is trying to convey that performativity is not synonymous to theatrics, but rather something that is repeated again and again. They go further to explain *performativity* as the following:

“[...] I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that “performance” is not a singular “act” or event, but rather a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.” (Butler, 2011, p. 60).

2.7 Queer Phenomenology

In this thesis I use Sarah Ahmed’s book *Queer Phenomenology – Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) as a tool to analyze my work, alongside Butler’s writings (as mentioned earlier). Ahmed reflects on the meanings of the word *orientation* and the importance of *objects* (Ahmed, 2006). This is explained by Ahmed, as the following:

“In this book I take up the concept of orientation as a way of putting queer studies in closer dialogue with phenomenology. I follow the concept of “orientation” through different sites, spaces, and temporalities. In doing so, I hope to offer a new way of thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race. Further, in this book I offer an approach to how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.1-2).

Being my work is performance art, Ahmed’s phenomenology fits quite well as it brings up the correlations between objects, queerness and the body. All three aspects my work utilizes. The way, I for example, use shampoo in one of my performance videos, *Shampoo Euphoria* (2022). I orientate myself towards the shampoo, I feel an impulse, in my body, to use it in some way and through these actions I take something reaches the surface from my consciousness, at the moment, during and after. Ahmed explains *orientation* when it relates to the body as the following:

“[...] phenomenology makes “orientation” central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed "toward" an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the "living body (Leib)." Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.2).

I find this quote interesting as it brings up the notion that many queer people orientate the world differently. As I have to continuously navigate (or orientate) the world with minimal guidance and representation, I have to shape my own body and world. It can be a lonely and confusing journey orientating myself in a society that is heavily heteronormative.

Ahmed also brings up the importance of affect:

“In my previous book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, the concept of orientation was also crucial. Here I worked with a phenomenological model of emotions as intentional: as being "directed" toward objects. So when we feel fear, we feel fear of something. I brought this model of emotional intentionality together with a model of affect as contact: we are affected by "what" we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us “toward” and “away” from such objects.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.2).

As a queer person navigating the world without any compass. What compass can I use to connect and shape my world and body? I find using my feelings, letting them be my compass has been a central part of my journey in life, when it comes to gender and queerness. What makes me approach certain objects the way I do? What emotions are underneath those actions? The fear I felt when growing out my moustache was central for me. Why did it make me happy and feel more comfortable in my body, yet strike so much fear? These are some of the questions I try to answer in part 5.0 *ARTISTIC PROCESS* (the analysis).

3.0 ARTISTIC CONTEXT

3.1 Performance Art – A Radical Artform

Performance Art is an art form that has a radical history (Goldberg, 1984, p. 36). In *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* (1984) edited by Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas, they select a texts by Roselee Goldberg: *Perfomance: A Hidden History*. Goldberg explains this radical history connected to performance art, as the following:

“The stance of performance artists has historically been a radical one: against the establishment (be it art or politics), against the commercialization of art, and against the strict confinement of museums and galleries. Performance artists have acted against the overriding belief that art is limited to the production of art objects, insisting instead that art is primarily a matter of ideas and actions. Each performance calls the audience to experience the making of an artwork rather than contemplating static objects with an exhibition framework.” (Goldberg, 1984, p. 36).

This radical art form fits my objective of creating change, quite well. Being, I’m exploring gender in a society that is heavily influenced by the *heteronormative matrix* (Butler, 2006). A powerful force, that could be compared in power to the establishments that Goldberg highlights here. Perhaps, the *heteronormative matrix* is more influential and powerful than the examples given in this quote? At the same time, I’m using *actions* (as well as my body and other objects) as the art form. When the audience must actively observe my actions, they might also engage in an active discussion, which I hope, will again contribute to change. In other words, by creating *dissensus* among the audience (Rancière, 2010). One might argue that performance art in itself is often considered an artform others find confusing. Others might look at a performance and more questions arise. They might wonder why this person is just doing these actions over and over again. Why is Abramovic, for example, just sitting there in a chair in her performance *The Artist is Present* (2010)? Is that art? It makes me think that performance art in itself, no matter the context or concept behind it, can quite easily create *dissensus*. In performance art the body is the medium, which fits well with gender, sex and gender expression as well as with the theory *affect*.

3.2 Influential Work by Other Artists

Throughout my process I have observed and reflected upon other artists work as a part of my artistic research. However, I do not analyse this work in my thesis. It's rather an influential starting point for my own reflections and personal artwork. I've seen *Matrix of Gender*, an exhibition at *Bomuldsfabrikken*, *71 BODIES: NORMAL* by Daniel Mariblanca, *Butch Tribute* by Marte Reithaug Sterud and Ann-Christin Kongsness, *Batty Bwoy* by Harald Beharie during *Ravnedans* and *KJØNN, SKIFTE, ROM – Debate*, movie screening and book launch during *Arendalsuka*. I have also been influenced by the musician Dorian Electra. As a backdrop, as I previously mentioned in 2.2.2 *Feminist Performance Art in USA During the 70s*, I have studied several female performance artists. I see that I have been influenced by Ana Medianta and Marina Abramovic in my work. However, this is only slightly mentioned in my analysis, as the core of it is to analyze my own work. It is, never the less, important to set my work in an artistic context in relation to other artists. Therefore, mentioning the art and artists that has influenced me here and pulling some examples from some of them throughout my thesis.

4.0 METHOD

The assessment method of this thesis is a practice based project, consisting of my artistic research. This is done by using empirical evidence from a performative autoethnographic basis point. I highlight critical gender theories from Judith Butler, as well as looking at *queer phenomenology* by Sarah Ahmed. I also pull inn discourses from my lived experiences and society, political discussions and forms of oppression as a form of data. However, this master's thesis does not use *discourse analysis* as a full-on method. Rather a combination of different autoethnographic methods in a performative and queer way. This complexity, or fragmented research method, has contributed to further reflections in my everyday life and artistic research as being free. This is evident when I have used several different methods to collect empirical evidence in my research and process: written log and reflections, video, audio recordings, reflectional notes, clothing, creative writing, Snapchat recordings and hair, to mention a few. However, in this thesis, I will be using my performance art pieces as the main source for the analysis, this is explained in the section 4.3 *Timeline*.

4.1 Autoethnography

In the book *Hva er autoetnografi?* (2021), which can be translated as *What is Autoethnography*, autoethnography is described as the interaction between the personal and the cultural. *Auto* meaning introspection and observation of the researchers thoughts, feelings and reflections. *Ethno* meaning culture, this is the part where the researcher looks at the culture and its context and how it operates. *Graphy* is the stories, experiences and observations done by the researcher. This personal insight is the empirical evidence and is seen as scientific knowledge (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 15-16).

4.1.1 Queer Autoethnography

The book also brings up that autoethnography can be queer. It describes this as a method where the researcher can oppose and challenge fixed definitions while simultaneously looking at equality. Language can never replace or provide precise definitions of a phenomenon. The book highlights that this includes *identity*. The book also highlights that this method aims to challenge ideologies and discourses (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 56-57). As I go further into the complexity of this research, in the next point about performative autoethnography, I find queer autoethnography fits my thesis well. As I interpret this method it is clear to me that utilizing language to pin down my research to be clear and concise is not possible. However, the research as I see it, can impose further discourse and questions to challenge the *heteronormative matrix*.

4.1.2 Performative Autoethnography

In the book *What is Autoethnography?*, Performative autoethnography is elaborated upon. It is described as a reflective method where the results are the interactions between researcher(s) and others within a specific sociocultural context. The personal is political and the interpretation of knowledge is highlighted. Performative autoethnography implies that master narratives can be challenged (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 57). I find the *heteronormative matrix* could be interpreted as a master narrative in this context. As it is a narrative, with great force. I aim to challenge it, as I have mentioned. As the book describes, the researcher can question where, when and who we are to create new knowledge. This knowledge is open to the fact that we as humans are in constant change in relation to others and our environment, which is in constant change as well (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 57). I see my thesis as an exploration of

the ebb and flow between me and my surroundings, how we both are in constant change. And the personal experiences (which is data), can be utilized as reflective points in my research.

Performative autoethnography is also described in this book as a method with unclear boundaries. It is many things at once, changing continuously with research, researchers and performance. In autoethnography in general, the subject is never stable or stagnate throughout life and can not be located. The subject is fragmented and in interaction with contexts, which is performance (Karlsson et al., 2021, p. 57). As this method describes the complexity of this research in this way, it is evident that it can difficult to pin down. Rather than seeing this as a challenge, I find it gives the research a freedom to ask more questions rather than providing answers. As the book argues, we are in constant change and fragmented. The research also reflects this. It gives me the freedom to dive into the unknown.

4.2 Performative Writing

In this master thesis I will use a method of performative writing. Here I will let the words flow, a stream of consciousness if you will. Jumbled up thoughts that have come up throughout my process of transformation, that generate manifesto-like statements, rants. This will always be highlighted in the colour blue.

I associate this colour with communication, a colour that is connected to speech. Others associate the colour blue with boyhood, manhood and masculinity. While pink is the colour people associate with girlhood, womanhood and femininity. Two colours opposing each other in an echo of binary oppression. A chokehold matrix cage of two bold polarities. I find all of this a bunch of nonsense: Assigning a colour to what a baby's genitals look like, is just absurd. Why do we even care about babies' genitals? Is it a boy? Is it a girl? Who cares. It's just a baby. And before the baby even arrives we have to give that baby an assignment. As if the foetus even has language, is a highly academic student and is able to write an assignment. Here's a pink assignment, my unborn child foetus! Let me find u a big cake with either pink or blue sprinkles hidden inside it. Let's blow up a confetti cannon with either pink or blue and cheer. Yes! Through you a gender reveal party! And afterwards we'll talk about your pink or blue duties when you grow older. I'm so excited to know what you have in between your legs. Will you use your genitals to play with Barbie? Will you use your genitals to open the door to the woman's restroom, proceeding to go into another private stall, all by yourself?

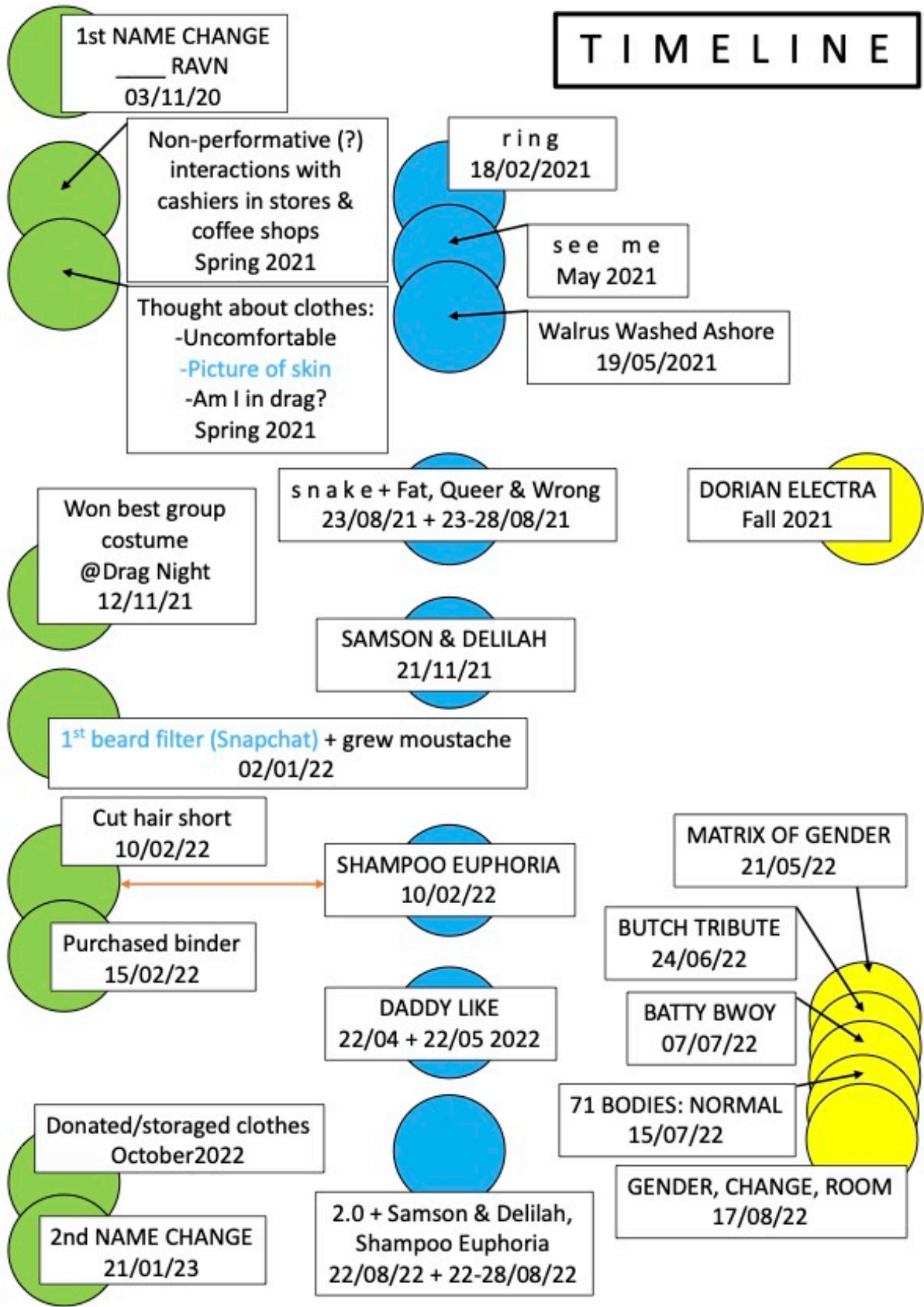
Will you cheer for your pink bedroom? Will you become a mother? Can you even reproduce? Will you find your prince charming? Will he save you? How will I know what to call you, name you or how to even dress you, if I don't know your genitals?! Please doctor, perceive my babies' chromosomes by just looking at their body, even though we know that gender is a spectrum. And that you can even have different chromosomes in different parts of your genome (Almás, 2022). I don't care if my child may be intersex. Apparently, that is an error. No purple, yellow or green children allowed. Just put my child in a restrained pink or blue box oh dear doctor, so that they may never know how to get out.

4.3 Timeline

I have chosen to use a threefold timeline:

1. Transformation in my everyday life (thoughts, reflections, actions and objects I gravitate towards). Marked green bellow.
2. Artistic performative work (my own work such as performance videos and live performances). Marked blue bellow.
3. Artistic research (other artists' work). Marked yellow bellow.

TIMELINE



Direction, orientation, path, line

The starting point of the entire timeline is the first name change I did in 2020 (before I started writing my master's thesis). My entire life could technically be included as empirical autoethnographic data. However, this name change was the starting point, with conscious action, towards a transformation on my identity (when it comes to gender). However, the name change was subtle, and nobody knew it was related to my gender. Earlier this year (2023) I changed my name again. This time, rooted and grounded in masculinity. As the second name change feels like an ending (or perhaps just the beginning?), it is the endpoint of my timeline. The name changes are also placed in the 3rd line (transformation in my everyday life). Throughout the 1st line I've placed all the works of other artists that have influenced line 2 and 3. In line 2, I've placed my own artistic performative work such as my live performances and performance videos. The 3rd line shows highlights through actions and events in my everyday life. The aspects of my everyday life also include thoughts and reflections that I highlight in my analysis. This also manifests itself in performative writing throughout my thesis (more in 3.2 Performative Writing). Objects that I gravitate towards also influence my everyday life, that again influence the 2nd line. One example of this is a shampoo bottle, that became an object of major importance, in one of my performance videos *Shampoo Euphoria*. All three lines influence each other and overlap, like a web.

5.0 ARTISTIC PROCESS - ANALYSIS

5.1 RAVN – Name Change

As I have shown in chapter 2.0, Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* connects orientation, objects and emotions. As Ahmed stated, we are *directed towards objects* with our emotions. In other words, *emotional intentionality*. Which is, again, in connection with *affect*. We move towards or away from objects depending on the way we are moved by them emotionally (Ahmed, 2006, p.2). On my transformative journey I've used many different names. A name could be an object, even though it can not per say be touched or seen, unless it is written down. However, it is something that holds so much meaning and association. So, let us entertain the idea of a name being synonymous to an object, in this scenario.

I've let myself try many different names in different settings and friend groups. Trying out names was exciting yet difficult for me. We live in a society where changing our first names is uncommon. People tend to find it difficult to call others by a different name if they change

it later in life. Names are repeated orally, like a ritual. And if you change your name from one binary to another, as in from a name other people usually consider a man's name to a woman's name, that is even more uncommon. People tend to fear what is unknown or uncommon, in my experience. I find this is highlighted by Ahmed:

“So, we might fear an object that approaches us. The approach is not simply about the arrival of an object: it is also how we turn toward that object. The feeling of fear is directed toward that object, while it also apprehends the object in a certain way, as being fearsome. The timing of this apprehension matters. For an object to make this impression is dependent on past histories, which surface as impressions on the skin. At the same time, emotions shape what bodies do in the present, or how they are moved by the objects they approach. The attribution of feeling toward an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) moves the subject away from the object, creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat. Emotions involve such affective forms of (re)orientation.” (Ahmed, 2006, p.2).

People had so many different opinions of different names I tried out. Their *past histories*, or associations, with the names was very prevalent. I heard many stories about other people they knew that had the same name, I was using only for that evening. I wanted to find a name that fit me. And how could I know which one was for me, if I could not use the name, the object, before legally changing it? I needed my emotions as a compass, and trying out a name, all by myself, did not provoke enough emotion for me. However, I became more and more fearsome when I decided to try out yet another name among others. And in turn, others became fearsome or unsure as well. It felt like I was disturbing a very sacred strict ritual. And others assumed I had changed my name forever. Even though I had stated several times that I was trying out different names, to eventually find the right one. This again brings up the points from Schechner when it comes to *performing in everyday life*:

“Everyone masters to some degree or another the social codes of daily life. Rebels intentionally break the rules; revolutionaries want to change them permanently.” (Schechner, 2013, p. 208).

It was clear to me that we do indeed have unwritten rules and rituals that we repeat. I was deviating from the social codes surrounding names. In the end, I found myself only trying out different names with a small group of people. And then, only writing different names in my notes on my phone, reading them out loud to myself. Earlier, I questioned if a small change,

by myself, could be a revolutionary act of changing the constructions and codes of social behaviour and gender in society at large? I still don't know. But the effects of me trying out different names, may seem as if I did not change anything. It does make me aware of the strict social codes we are surrounded by in our everyday life.

However, this experimentation or exploration of different names did not start before 2020, when I changed my name legally for the first time. The name given to me at birth never fit. It felt like I had a pebble in my shoe. Gender or no gender, I needed to be free of all ties. Be my own individual. I changed my entire name. My last name I changed to Ravn (Raven in English). I have had a strong tie to ravens and crows for large parts of my life. Ravens have a strong association to Norse and Celtic mythology. I've been fascinated by the Norse God Odin and the Celtic Goddess The Morrigan, for a long time, both being associated with ravens. Odin a god of war said to have two ravens, Hugin and Munin, sitting on his shoulders and flying around the world being his eyes (Magerøy & Næss, 2023). The Morrigan, a goddess of war and death could turn into a raven (Cartwright, 2021). In both mythologies the ravens are associated with war, which is in return associated with death. However, in today's society, death is seen entirely differently. The Vikings saw death as less grotesque as we may see it today, it was a part of life and they believed in an afterlife (Næss, 2021). Reflecting upon this I see death being a symbol of a cycle. Being an individual who is spiritual, death as a symbol holds a wider connotation for me. We experience many deaths during life. We are born again and again, we go through many cycles, we are reborn over and over. To me death, rebirth and transformation are all the same. The Morrigan is associated with war and battle, but she is also a goddess of transformation and could shapeshift into many different animals (Cartwright, 2021).

Being I've changed my entire name legally again in 2023, first and last name. Letting go of Ravn was sad. It had been a name, simultaneously, I had used it as a first name. I was someone who only had one single name. However, keeping it as my artist name it could live on. And maybe the layered meaning behind the name can come out in my performance art and artistic research.

5.2 Previous Artistic Research and Work

5.2.1 *r i n g* - Fail Again, Fail Better

In the spring of 2021, I participated in a workshop by Marit Roland *Fail Again, Fail Better* where we were encouraged to *dare to fail*. That failure can be beneficial, transformative and positive for your art. We were challenged to try something that we had never done before. I am a teacher in the subjects English, social science, art and theatre. I have therefore been interested in human rights, international and national politics, theatre as well as visual- and figurative art. It is no wonder that I had started to become very interested in performance art, right before I started my master's degree. I had just started writing poems in my spare time as well, however I kept this as a secret. During *Fail Again, Fail Better* I chose to read some of my poems aloud, over Zoom. As a digital performance of sorts. Some had tears in their eyes as a result, and the feedback was very positive. I realized, I could actually write. For the next few months, I wrote almost every day. Writing had at that point become a large part of my artistic work, either as part of the process or as part of the end result.

Another workshop we had in the spring of 2021 was *Tableau Vivant* with Jørund Føreland Pedersen. A workshop where we investigated merging an image and duration with creating a performance video. We were set to do an exercise where we had to make eye contact for a few minutes, inspired by Marina Abramovic's performance *The Artist is Present* (2010). Followed by creating a performance video. We had to find a place, concept and/or composition, set it up, place ourselves in the frame and sit still for at least 10 minutes. I sat down, alone, and let my intuition decide my position. I took off my engagement ring, stared straight into the camera, put on melancholic music and sat there quietly for the 10 minutes. I gave it the title *r i n g*.

The responses from fellow students afterwards were very interesting. Some could not put into words what they had seen. Others thought it looked like I was bored. Further questions and confusion makes me question if a *gap* in the sensible had emerged between my fellow students, creating *dissensus* (Rancière, 2010). However, most of them saw what I experienced internally: a vulnerability that came and went, like waves, with the rhythm of the music. Personally, I had short lived emotional reactions that were embodied, in other words, I experienced *affect* (Hovik, 2020). And perhaps my fellow students experienced the same, as some became quite emotional.



Frame from performance video: *r i n g*

Duration: 10:39

Date: 18th of February, 2021

RAVN

Link: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_dm5o18am

Formal Art Analysis:

An individual perceived as a woman sits in the middle of the frame close to the camera. They are white and leaning their face on their hand. Having a rounder face and hand, one may assume the subject is fat. They have hair that is parted on the side and the length of the hair reaches their shoulders. Wearing a blue fuzzy sweater having eye contact with the camera. The facial expression is mostly relaxed. The ring finger has a visible marking where a ring may have been. The entire video is tinted in a blue aesthetic, however, keeping some of the warmth in the face and skin. The background is dark and even. During the video performance, the subject sits in the same position, quite still. You can see the subject breathing, swallowing at times and becoming emotional in waves. However, no tears shed down the face. The eyes are sometimes slightly filled with tears and then dry up again.

Interpretation:

Through the lens of Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (2006), I interpret this video performance in several ways, when it comes to the *heteronormative matrix* and *gender performativity*. As

mentioned, the subject, who may be perceived as a woman, has a mark on their ring finger where a ring may have been. This makes me think of women and the pressure to be of value in society, by being married to and desired by a man. Judith Butler uses the song (*You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman*) by Aretha Franklin as an example of this, in their book *Gender Trouble*: “This achievement requires a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair.” (Butler, 2006, p. 30). They further argue that gender, in today’s society, is strongly linked to desire and is defined as such within heterosexuality: “[...] gender presupposes not only a casual relation among sex, gender and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects and expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire.” (Butler, 2006, p. 31). This video performance also reminds me of queer women not being able to marry someone of the same sex in many different countries. Or if they can, many churches and priests are not willing to perform same sex marriages. This is a greater institution with massive power in our society. The church and state, as a marriage institution, has long been an institution valuing heterosexuality. Butler highlights a greater force as an institution: “The institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.” (Butler, 2006, p. 31). *The institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality* is clearly a bigger overriding institution and force that has manifested itself in the church and state (when it comes to marriage). This makes me question: Where does *compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality* derive from? Is Christianity the root? These questions continued to echo in my mind further throughout my artistic research.

5.2.2 see me

During the exam in *KF-410 Art and Art Education*, I used the video performance *ring* as a starting point. I created a one-on-one performance concept, named *see me*. The audience would come one by one, into a room alone, with me, and sit across from each other with a table dividing us. On the table there would be a bowl with 12 different poems I had written from an autobiographical starting point from my own upbringing. The poems addressed the theme of emotional neglect and domestic violence. This also became important to me because of all the families who were undetected by the child services, due to Covid-19. I thought a lot

about all the children growing up with domestic violence, while in quarantine, more isolated than before.

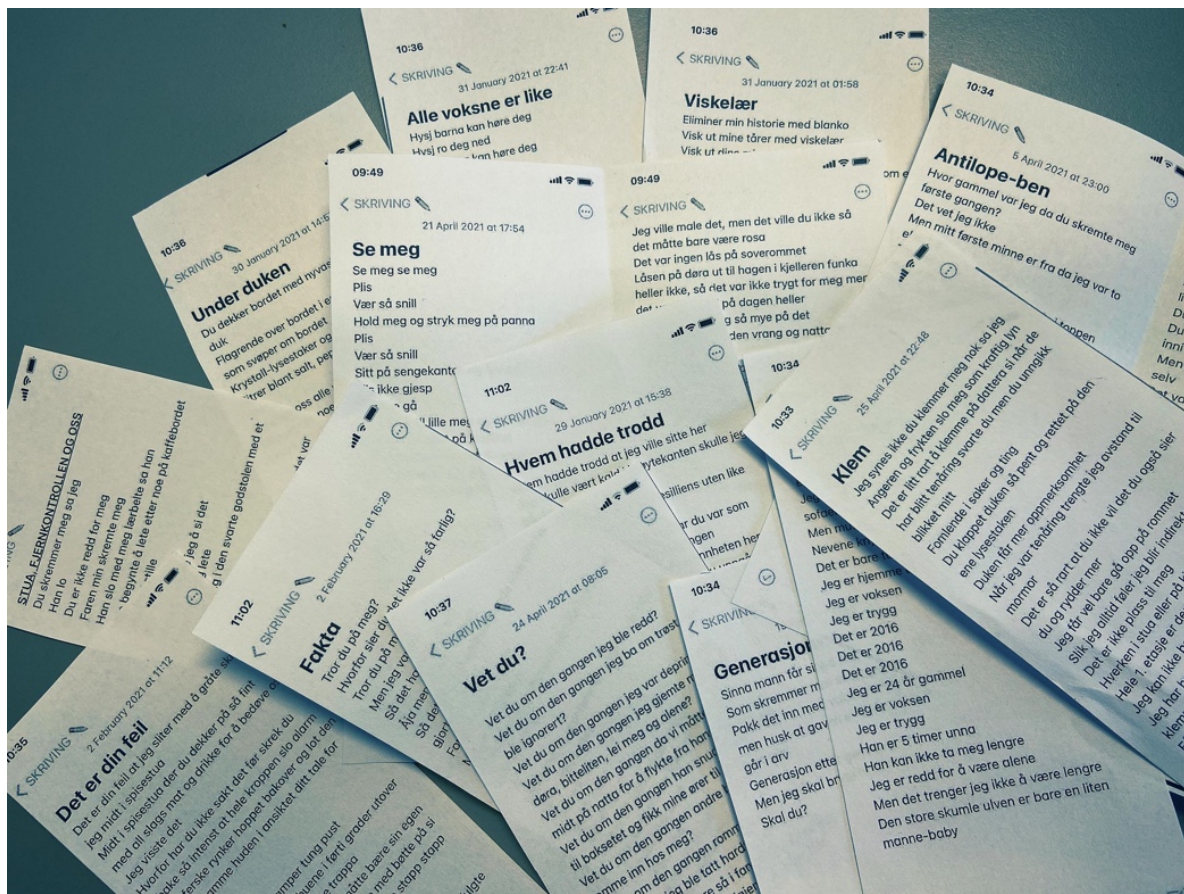


Photo from the process: *see me*

Collection of poems from a one-on-one performance concept

Date: May, 2021

RAVN

The participants would draw, from a bowl, one of the poems and I would read it to them. Afterwards, they were invited to make eye contact for 10 minutes. They could look away, they could leave, but when an alarm went off they had to leave the room and the next person could come in. Both *affect* (Hovik, 2020) and *dissensus* (Rancière, 2009)(Rancière, 2010) became important theories for me to use in this project. Themes such as closeness, mirroring, intimacy, body, time and space also became important for the dissemination. I also thought about whether this could be too intense and reflected upon the ethics of the concept. Rancière talks about the unbearable image, art that is difficult to look at. Could this performance be

experienced as too real? He argues that this type of art can effectively achieve change. On the other hand, he does argue that this type of art cannot take its own meaning or effect for granted (Skregelid, 2019). Personally, I saw this as a positive opportunity, opposed to an obstacle. By freeing myself from the result of the art, I could rather focus on the process itself. Hopefully creating *dissensus* and achieve discourse and change. This became more important to me than steering them in a very specific direction. All reflection, ambivalence, and resistance lead to discussion. A discussion I cannot manage, however. But I could hope that important conversations were started. Even though others could find the work difficult, or even disturbing, I could trust that the work had its own autonomy and had an important role in creating the change which was needed: Talking about children affected by domestic violence and neglect.

I had a chance of testing the concept with one fellow student and I got some feedback from them. They said there was a power imbalance, I held the power. They also felt it was very emotional, not knowing what was real or what was made up. Had I experienced any of the things in the poem, was something they were asking themselves. They also brought up the impact on their body. They felt, what I would describe as, *affect* (Hovik, 2020).

5.2.3 Walrus Washed Ashore

During the exam in *KF-411 Artistic Research* I chose to continue with video performance as the art form. This time the topic was fatphobia. As a fat person, fatphobia has affected me a lot. I have been exposed to discrimination from strangers on the street, among acquaintances, in the family and in the healthcare system. Statistically, fat people are less likely to be hired. Those of us who are fat are seen as lazy, dumb and lack self-control (Strings, 2019). Research also shows that the discrimination fat people experience can lead to earlier death. The consequences, of the stress caused by the discrimination fat folks experience, can even increase the chances of dying earlier. Some research has found that this increase is higher for fat people than other discriminated groups, such as discrimination related to ethnicity or sexual orientation (Spilde, 2015). In my opinion, fat people are considered ugly, greedy, unhealthy, stupid, irresponsible and immobile, in our western society. However, new documentary series, with extensive media coverage, such as *Eit feitt liv* (A Fat Life) on NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) as well as *The Body Positive Movement* becoming more known, this topic is even more relevant than before.

In my exam paper, the problem statement was:

How can I create autobiographic art which can dismantle fat phobia?



Frame from video performance: *Walrus Washed Ashore*

Duration: 11:30

Date: 19th of May, 2021

RAVN

Link: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_71z7ekoa

I brushed my hair smooth and styled it in an old fashioned way, reminding me of the 50s. I placed my hands in a simple, stylized feminine way. The background and the sheet on the bed are white. I carefully thought out a clean composition and kept the colors in the same cold blue tones as my previous work. I saw the aesthetic choices was calm, peaceful, clean and beautiful. My body, which society views as the opposite, contrast with the aesthetic. Perhaps this could hide some of my obvious intentions, which could create greater resistance, confusion and thus, hopefully, result in *dissensus* (Rancière, 2009) (Rancière, 2010).

Looking at this work now, I can see the intersection of being more gender non-conforming, today, and being fat. As I find gender non-conforming people are seen as deviant in society,

fat people are seen in a similar way. Today, being both androgynous and fat at the same time makes me question: Why are people in my everyday life giving me looks? And are they even necessarily looks of confusion or disgust? I go further into this in 5.3 Samson & Delilah, where I question for the first time why people are staring at me in the grocery store, having a moustache.

5.2.4 s n a k e



Live performance: *s n a k e*

Photos taken during workshop by Lisa Hennig Olsen

Duration: 2:38

Date: 8th of August, 2021

RAVN

Link, *live to camera*, filmed by Lisa Hennig Olsen: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_ozq0mpk4

The 7th and 8th of August 2021, I participated in a workshop by performance artist Lisa Hennig-Olsen. Here we explored the connection between the body and objects, *object exploration*. How could these objects be activated by movement? During the workshop we learned to draw as an alternative documentation technique (see pictures above). Here I made a live performance with a hose belonging to a CPAP machine. The performance titled *s n a k e*. The participants of the workshop created individual live performances. Together, we combined them and had a small intimate showing at *The Winebar at Mølla* in Kristiansand.

Afterwards, I further developed this performance and performed it live during the opening of the exhibition *Broken Silence* at the town hall/city hall in Kristiansand. The exhibition was curated by Tove-Mari Odderdal and was open during and created in cooperation with *Skeive Sørlandsdager* (Pride in Kristiansand). The opening of the exhibition was combined with the official opening of *Skeive Sørlandsdager*. Here I used the same dress as shown above, but had styled my hair the same way as in *Walrus Washed Ashore*. I dragged the hose on the floor and walked down the steps, by the audience, in the city hall, sat on my knees and tied the hose as many times I could around my neck. I then untied it slowly and dragged it back up the stairs. It was quiet the entire time. Many came up to me afterwards and expressed they had strong bodily reactions, making me question if they experienced *affect* (Hovik, 2020). I myself definitely did. As my body became affected by the action of choking myself with the hose. It felt like my body took over. In the exhibition itself I had displayed my video performance *r i n g*. I added a poem at the start of the video, which was about being fat and queer, and changed the title of the video performance to *Fat, Queer And Wrong*. Looking back I find myself question if both the live performance and new title to the video performance was strongly influenced by my feelings of being strangled by *the heteronormative matrix* (Butler, 2006).

5.3 Samson & Delilah

As a starting point, I decided to read Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* (2006). Here I wanted to find a quotation, let it inspire me, and on impulse, let it guide me intuitively to do an action and film it, in the present moment. I tried to find something that would stir up more questions than answers, and in some way, confuse me. And maybe even create *dissensus* (Rancière, 2009) (Rancière, 2010) in my own inner dialogue to spark this inspiration. Gender is such a huge part of our life and identity, and I was already feeling like my mind was in a labyrinth or chaos hence I had already started to deconstruct what gender meant for me in my life. I have always known that I am Queer in some shape or form, looking back. I've used a plethora of labels to define my identity throughout my entire life, from a young age. Meaning my autoethnographic process technically dates back to a very young age.

In addition, the discourse on gender identity on social media, had already started this process in a real way before starting my thesis. Judith Butler was the final push to dismantle the last

strong hold the heteronormative matrix had on my life. The following quotation was the inspiration for my first video-performance:

“[...] gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect - that is, in its effect - postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualisation; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalised or essentialist gender identities.” (Butler, 2006, p. 138).

In retrospect I also see that I have been influenced by Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*(1972) (Schons, 2017). Here, Mendieta transfers a beard from a man on to her face. Mendieta was a performance artist that was very influential in feminist performance art (Schons, 2017). She had strong opinions on the feminist movement in the art world, as well (Simonson, 2018, p. 16). Maybe she transferred the hair as a symbol of feminist power? Flipping the power structure of men onto women? It makes me question what my uncocious impulses were behind my actions, in my performance video *Samson & Delilah*. In retrospect I question if this was more about gender and masculinity for me, than a feminist act.



Frame from video performance: *Samson & Delilah*

Duration: 15:51

Date: 21st of November, 2021

RAVN

Link: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_qkyjh4ly

Formal Art Analysis:

The video depicts two people, an individual perceived as a man and an individual perceived as a woman. The individual perceived as a man sits on a stool in a bathroom, while the individual perceived as a woman trims his hair short with hair clippers. When the man's hair is trimmed, the man leaves, and the woman sits down in their place. The hair is collected by the woman in a plastic bag. A glue stick is used to glue the hair from the man's head on to the woman's upper lip, creating a moustache. They proceed to glue hair in place and trim it nicely with scissors. Finally, the video performance ends with different poses of the face and upper body which can be considered masculine. A fist leaning on their cheek and temple and a seriousness of the face, from different angles. A movement of the mouth, a pout, creates movement in the moustache, making the gesture humorous.

Interpretation:

After making this video performance I reflected upon different aspects of gender performativity when it comes to body language. My supervisor, André Eiermann, and I

reflected upon how different aspects the video could have historical and cultural references. Eiermann said it reminded him of the story of Samson and Delilah from the Bible. A story of Samson with great strength, and Delilah, his lover. She was convinced by his enemies to find his source of strength and then weaken him. Discovering that his hair was his source of strength, his hair was cut, and the story ends with him being captured. When his hair grows, he collapses the entire building, where he was being held captive, resulting in killing himself. The story can be interpreted in many ways. However, me and my supervisor started to think about how the power changes in the video. Taking the strength of the man, his hair, asking him to leave, and then taking the source of strength upon my body. Afterwards, some open-ended questions came to my mind: Whom is really betraying whom? Who has the power in this performance video? How does his body language transfer to me? Still I question if this was more about gender and masculinity for me, than a feminist act, like I've mentioned. However, analysing this work stirs up more questions than answers. And maybe that is the point? *A gap in the sensible*, within myself, has definitely emerged (Rancière, 2010).

After making the video I started to think more about what types of gestures, body language and speech I felt were gender performances. I started to notice that the way I walked was very performative and sometimes hyper feminine. I started to walk the way my body wanted to. Without thinking of gender. This resulted in me using my leg muscles more actively, and I started to notice less back-pain. The way I sat changed as well. Or did it? I started to order my coffee differently. Without being overly polite, creating a high-pitched voice and smiling extensively. This made me think about how gender is assigned to us at birth and how it truly is an assignment. Either you do it well and find it comfortable to act out. Or you perform it in such a way that it can feel unauthentic? Perhaps, even find it difficult, or painful? These acts are repeated in such a continuous and frequent manner in people's lives, as Butler points out in their work (Butler, 2006) (Butler, 2011). Do we perform gender in such a way that we end up bound to a matrix? I've moved, spoken, and acted in a certain manner for years, that was expected of me. I now felt free in my body. As the months passed, I started to notice I wanted to change my haircut as well. I had already stopped shaving my body hair for a couple of years. At the time I decided to stop shaving, it was purely a feminist act. Or at least that's what I told myself at the time. It wasn't an act of pushing against binary expectations, in a heteronormative way. Reflecting more upon this, I discovered I had done many things, gradually, throughout the years that I told myself had nothing to do with gender identity. I had tried so hard to broaden my understanding of womanhood, to make it fit. After thinking

about this, I decided to forget gender all together. And rather play with it. Without giving myself limitations. I stopped shaving/waxing my upper lip, giving me a slightly visible moustache. To my surprise, it was very comfortable for me to have. I did however shave it off and grow it back several times. But this was not because I wanted to shave it, but because I wanted to fit in, and to pass as my assigned gender at birth. Going to the grocery store made me nervous. Were people starring at my upper lip? Were people starring because of my fatness? I was used to this, being a fat person most of my adult life. But the looks seemed different. This time, people didn't stare at my body for that long. I felt like I saw a pattern. People starred first at my face, then my body, then my face again. And I saw a look on their face which I interpreted as confusion first and foremost. It began to become so intense for me that I was unsure if I was interpreting correctly or not. Maybe I was. However, I felt like it was important for me to dismantle the notion that I was the problem. If I was right or not in my interpretation of the looks I received, my thoughts and fear was growing. And so, I continued to read *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, which in some ways, dismantled my limiting beliefs about gender. It helped me face my fears surrounding breaking free from the *heteronormative matrix*. And moving throughout society became a game. Maybe it can be fun to be androgynous and just let people stare at me at the grocery store? Maybe, just maybe I could just see my body as a performative subject moving throughout the world, creating dissensus. Thus, start a small ripple effect in people's lives to dismantle the *heteronormative matrix* and the strong hold it may have on their own lives. And maybe, contribute others to be brave, be free and express themselves how they want to, like me.

You may ask yourself, after reading my formal analysis: Why do I use the phrases *a person perceived as a woman* and *a person perceived as a man*? If bodily significations can not be the foundation to indicate what a man or a woman truly is, as Butler highlights as their main point in part one of *Gender Trouble*, then can we really assume anyone's gender? Personally, I think people can only know how people identify, by asking. How can you ask without assuming, within the question, you may ask? Easy: How do you identify and what pronouns do you use? Or even better, introduce yourself and say: Hi! My name is [insert name here] and I use [enter pronouns here]. Then, the other person can choose to out themselves or not. Because, as we all know by now, gender can be a question of violence, or even a question between life and death. And yes. You might find this all so new. Maybe this seem like a lot of work. Well, you can ignore these tips if you'd like. It's your choice. However, if you value

compassion, community and cooperation. I think you should think less about the amount of effort and more about the bodies, the people, the human beings that matter.

Now that I have gotten that out of the way, let's get back to the analysis. As you look at *Samsom & Delilah* you may see symbols and bodily attributes giving you information to make your own assumptions. But will they be correct? This is why I have chosen to phrase it as *a person perceived as*. Because, truly, if bodily significations can not tell us anything. Then what about other symbols that are easily ever-changing. Such as nail length, nail polish, hair, clothing. In other words, someone's gender expression. These symbols may also not indicate anything. People choose their gender expression to feel more comfortable in their bodies, but also to signal their identity to the world. Your gender and gender expression may also not make sense to those who are in the heteronormative matrix. A man may have a feminine gender expression. You may think: "Yes of course! A homosexual man may wear a dress. He's still a man". And to that I would say: Yes! But only a cisgender homosexual man? Regardless of sexuality, what about a pre-op trans man? Can he wear a dress while not receiving hormone replacement therapy or getting any gender-affirming surgeries? If you say: "Well of course!", then good. However, if this blows your mind, then good.

As I write this, I find that my phrasing might create dissensus. And truly, that is my goal, as I have already stated. My artistic research and artistic work exists on many levels. In my video performances, live performances and in my everyday life. But also, like now, in my writing. I find, I can't split the art from the artist. The performance from the performance artist. The performance from me, the individual. And that is not to say that I am performative in such a way that it is an act. Rather, as an individual that needs to express their life, authenticity, processes, phases, reflections and inner world through their artistic work.

Now, back to the analysis.

Being in a queer and free body, made me want to cut my hair short. The day I was going to cut my hair, I was in the shower, shampooing my hair before my appointment at the hairdresser's. Suddenly I realized that I had to document my longer hair, one last time. So, I acted on impulse: Found my phone, propped it inside the mirror cabinet in my bathroom and started filming.

5.4 Shampoo Euphoria



Frame from video performance: *Shampoo Euphoria*

Duration: 7:39

Date: 10th of February, 2022

RAVN

Link: https://video.uia.no/media/t/0_kzvpitfd

Formal Art Analysis:

The performance video starts off with an individual with shampoo in their hair. They seem to be naked, but you can only see the upper body. Not being able to see the chest and lower body. The person is wet, the wall behind them has white tiles and a white door. The video is cool in colour tone. The hair starts off being crunched up on the head. The individual pulls at the hair with both hands revealing that it is long, shaping it with a part down the middle of the crown and pulling it down. This revealing that the hair is shoulder length. The individual reveals that they have hair located in their armpits by lifting their arms. A smirk appears on their face and they continue to apply shampoo from the hair on their head to their armpits, while slightly pulling at it.

Next, they shape the hair on their head in a standing cone shape. However, it can not stand on its own and falls to the side. They continue to shape it, but now in a short style, and quickly

pouting the mouth. Then the face turns more serious, they cross their arms and lean back (time: 1:07). Again, they shape the hair in a cone shape straight up, but this time gathering more shampoo in their hands. A ball of shampoo forms on the hands and they apply it to the cheeks, chin and upper lip, forming a shape that resembles a beard (time 1:24). They then form the hair back again to the short style and stare into the camera (time: 2:00). Every time they shape their hair and/or apply shampoo to the face, they look to the side, making us believe they are looking into a mirror. Thereafter, they pose or reveal a facial expression towards the camera lens, gazing into it. This back and forth action happens throughout the majority of the performance video.

The individual creates a full beard, handlebar moustache, sideburns and a goatee (time: 2:00-2:30), then again, moving on to transform the hair on their head in different shapes. Firstly, somewhat chaotic, trying to make it stand up on its own. Then, into space buns, one bun on the top of the head, a comb over and then making the eyebrows bushy with the shampoo. And once again, attempting to make it stand up on its own. However, this time, more successfully to the side. (time: 2:30-5:00).

The person finally settles for a slick back hairstyle and focuses on making facial hair styles, at the end of the performance video. Going from a very oversized moustache, to oversized sideburns, and then back to a full beard, again pouting the mouth (time: 5:00-6:05). Finally forming the hair back to the top of the head in a short hairstyle, the individual keeps the full beard and ruffs up the eyebrows again. (time: 6:05-6:27). Now the performance video comes to a close as they remove the shampoo from the face. Turning on, what seems to be, a sink below them. As you hear the running water, they rinse the shampoo off the face. Leaning over the sink from time to time, out of frame. Next, they slick back the hair and observe themselves in the mirror. Then, into the camera lens. They sigh, stare, then look closely at the lens and observe their natural hair on their upper lip, as they move the upper lip and face from side to side. This makes us understand that the individual may be able to see themselves on a screen attached to the camera. The video performance ends by them removing some of the shampoo residue from the chest. They sigh again, take a step back, and gaze into the camera lens (time: 6:27-7:39).

Interpretation:

Having used *object exploration* in a previous workshop by Lisa Hennig Olsen. Gravitating towards objects and to then explore them, on an impulse, was not new to me. I was located in the shower, thinking about my hair appointment that I had booked two hours later. I wanted it to be clean before the appointment. So, there I was, standing there, looking at the shampoo. Squeezing it out into my hand and started to lather up my hair. As I usually do, in the shower, my mind started to wander. Knowing this was the last time I would be able to feel it being this long, I felt a strong urge to document it one last time. The shampoo was already in my hair at this point. Then, childhood came to mind. A memory of playing with soap on my face as a kid, in the bathtub. Next, on an impulse, I get out of the shower, prop my phone in the mirror cabinet and start recording.

Sarah Ahmed goes into objects and their effects on people, in her book *Queer Phenomenology : Orientations, Objects, Others*, 2006:

“Phenomenology is often characterized as a “turn toward” objects, which appear in their perceptual “thereness” as objects given to consciousness. Rather than consciousness being seen as directed toward itself; it is understood as having objects in its view-as being shaped by that which appears before it in “this here and now.”” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 25).

What Ahmed is referring to here can be seen in my process in the shower. The shampoo was the starting point. Not my consciousness. The shampoo was the spark of the childhood memory that resulted in me creating art. This *turn toward objects* is further explained by Ahmed:

“We are turned toward things. Such things make an impression upon us. We perceive them as things insofar as they are near to us, insofar as we share a residence with them. Perception hence involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 27).

The shampoo is in my view. It is an easily available object in my everyday life making it an object I daily share a residence with. As Ahmed clarifies, this is connected to *orientation*. (pull in a definition of orientation)

According to Ahmed's reading of Husserl's interpretation of the object, the objects has a *twofold directedness* (Ahmed 2006, p. 28). We approach objects depending on how we are moved by the objects themselves. Ahmed further explains this as the following:

“First, I am directed toward an object (I face it), and then I take a direction toward it (for instance, I might or might not admire it). While directionality might be twofold, this "twofoldness" does not necessarily involve a sequence in time: in seeing the object I already apprehend it in a certain way, as a concrete "it" that has qualities that might attract or repel me, or even leave me indifferent, which might affect how "it" enters my view and whether it stays in view or passes from view. Turning toward an object turns "me" in this way or that, even if that "turn" does not involve a conscious act of interpretation or judgment.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 28).

This *twofold directedness* has become important not only in my artistic work, but also in my performance in everyday life. While I have to navigate where I want to turn next, I have had to use my feelings as a compass. What objects do I gravitate towards, without judgement, has been important for me to find out how I want to present and express myself. What clothing I put on, how I move and even down to what I want to order as a drink. Even though none of these things are necessarily related to gender, they might be related to authenticity. And perhaps being connected to our authentic self is how we are truly connected to our feelings.

5.5 Daddy Like

When I started to question gender norms more and more consciously, I started to listen to hyper pop music. A genre many trans- and gender-non-conforming people like. Many trans women have use electronic effects to warp their voices to a higher pitch, such as *SOPHIE*. It makes me wonder if it is to experience gender euphoria? I quickly found myself down a rabbit hole on the internet within the hyper pop genre. And suddenly I stumbled upon an artist named *Dorian Electra*. One of their music videos caught my eye: *Daddy Like* (Dorian Electra, 2019, 0:00).

I listened to this song over and over again. Like a ritual, in my everyday life. Behind closed doors, while I did the dishes, while taking a shower, while tidying my apartment. Even listening to it on my way to catch the bus, on my headset. I started to learn the lyrics by heart.

I watched the music video, over and over again and showing it to many of my friends. I found there was a way of exploring masculinity, without it having to mean serious. This description of me learning this song, doing it alone, with others, repeating this ritualistic acts, is all a part of performance in everyday life (Schechner, 2013).

I found myself lip syncing to it on the daily. And as someone who has been a part of queer culture since I was a teenager, I knew where the performative roots of lip syncing applied. Lip syncing is a performance genre drag artists use on stage. More and more people know of lip syncing, when it comes to drag, by watching the competitive TV-series *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Two contestants are placed at the bottom each week, and have to lip sync in hopes to remain in the contest. One drag queen is eliminated each week and one remains as the winner and is crowned the next drag superstar (Pasulka, 2019).

Skeive Studenter Agder, a queer student organization in Kristiansand and Grimstad, has a *Drag Night* once a month at the local student bar in Kristiansand. I had gone many times and felt an urge to participate in the lip sync contest, open to the audience to participate, at the end of the show. This time, I wanted to give it a shot. I googled the lyrics in full panic, just to be sure I knew them by heart, and applied to the contest. This night 10 participants were competing. I went up on stage. And suddenly, a full-blown choreography came out of me, from nowhere. Or maybe from my subconscious? Or perhaps from all the ritualistic times of listening to it while doing the dishes. I used the entire stage and went into a sort of trans. I found the whole thing exhilarating and affirming. I tapped into masculinity in a very public way, like I had never done before.

Nonetheless, it was all fun and games. As I have learned in my involvement in drag, it is entertainment. It has nothing to do with the performers identity (but again this is just a generalization, there is always exceptions and gender is complex, as I have already pointed out in my previous performative writing). A gay cis man doesn't identify as a woman just because he entertains as a drag queen, on the weekends. Even though that drag queen, who identifies as a cis man, strives to achieve "realness" as a woman (Butler, 2011, p. 88). It is just for the nights on stage. However, if you trace back the history of drag back to *ballroom culture*, many trans people have used drag as a safe space to explore their gender. Or at least that is how I interpreted the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990), which Butler goes thoroughly into in *Bodies That Matter*, by the way (Butler, 2011, p. 81-97). Maybe drag is a

way to explore peoples boundaries and find out what path, in everyday life, they want to follow, when it comes to gender. Through the art form of drag, people can try out what is just art and what feels good in their body. Here, they can figure out where the line goes. What is just a form of entertainment/art and what is calling/familiar, in such a profound way, that the individual needs to explore/apply similar expressions to everyday life? Let us explore freely please. Let us have one persona on stage and another in life. Please don't be so confused by the complexity. Because yes. Drag and gender identity are separate things, people. Listen up! But please just let us explore when we need to, without you all becoming so concerned if we are *this* or *that*. Let us explore without you becoming confused. And yes, we are not the ones confusing people, and definitely not the children. You are the ones confused. You are the ones in a binary chokehold. And I feel sorry for you. You are a prisoner to the *heteronormative matrix*, my friend. Because the freedom I've experienced by unpacking and dismantling all of these binary echoes in my mind, is magical. And I've found true belonging, friendship and a chose family. You, my confused friend, you white cis heteronormative man perhaps, you seem lonely. And yes, I see your pain. And I'm not trying to attack you. You see, this is important. Because as we all know by now, hopefully, people are killed by your rhetoric, pal! Just look at what happened to Venus Xtravaganza (Butler, 2011, p. 81-97). I cried the first time I learned what happened to her in *Paris is Burning*. Maybe you should watch it. My friend.

Now back to the analysis.

Ahmed brings up the *pressure* to conform and to *live a certain kind of life* in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006):

“We can recall here the different meanings of the word "pressure": the social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life can feel like a physical "press" on the surface of the body, which creates its own impressions. We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure, or what I call "stress points"[...]" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 17).

This *pressure* that Ahmed brings up, and describing it as a powerful thing, makes me think of the *heteronormative matrix*, that Butler talks about in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 2006). This again reminds me of the gender assignment that we receive at birth. The pressure to live a

certain kind of life can be, as Ahmed points out here, *like a physical press on the surface of the body*. As she points out, in this quote, this creates *impressions*. Is Ahmed trying to say that these kinds of *impressions* can be, for example, the feeling of being *pressed into lines*?

Ahmed further explains and reflects on the meaning of the word *lines*. She reflects on the word *line*, *direction* and *path* and their meanings in relation to each other (Ahmed, 2006). She firstly explains a path as the following: “The path is made out of foot prints - traces of feet that “tread” and that in “treading” create a line on the ground.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). I interpret this as Ahmed saying that a path is synonymous to a line, in her phenomenology. She further reflects upon the need for directions to be able to follow a line/path:

“A direction is thus produced over time; a direction is what we are asked to follow. The etymology of “direct” relates to “being straight” or getting “straight to the point.” To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without mediation. Within the concept of direction is a concept of “straightness.” To follow a line might be a way of becoming straight, by not deviating at any point.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16).

As a direction is something that we are asked to follow, this again reminds me of the gender assignment we receive at birth. Especially when it comes to *straightness* as Ahmed brings up in this statement. We are all directed to follow a line of boy or girl. As an assigned girl at birth, for example, the person is expected to follow the line of girlhood their entire life. Getting a husband, reproduce and have children. To be straight. Not just as in orientation, but also as in someone following a line and never deviating it at any point. This makes sense to me, as why drag, being a form of entertainment, is a safe way for others to explore their gender. Perhaps, it is a way of deviating slightly from a line without actually treading too far off the path? Perhaps, doing drag to explore one’s gender identity, is a way of relieving oneself from the immense pressure to follow one path or another? Being in a society that is binary, as well, is a pressure. If you do tread of the line of one gender, is there a new pressure to go directly to the other side and be the opposite gender? We do know that gender is a spectrum. There are many identities under the trans umbrella. How can you explore androgynously without that pressure?

5.6 2.0



Picture taken by Ana Carolina Tronstad Hausvik from live performance: 2.0

Duration: Approximately 10 minutes

Date: 22nd of August 2022

RAVN

The 22nd of August 2022, I performed a live performance that I had further developed from the year before, *s n a k e* (2021). This time I looked different. I was not comfortable in wearing the blue dress anymore. I had cut my hair, I had grown a small moustache. I had not changed my first name, but everyone in my life just called me by my last name at the time, Ravn. Therefore, I decided to use that, and only that, as my name during the live performance. I renamed the performance to *2.0*. Being a performance that felt like an ending, but also just a continuum. Maybe I would like to make a *3.0* later? The duality of the number 2 also brought up a meaning for me. Being a reflection of the gender binary. As I reflected more on my intention for the further development for the live performance, I thought about how I felt like I moved throughout the world differently. Thus, I decided to walk down the stairs like I did the year before, dragging the hose from the CPAP machine on the floor. The walk the same, if not feminine, definitely restraint and my legs moving closely together. As I walked down I moved to the middle of the stage and sat down on a stool. This time, not kneeling on the floor, like the last year. Perhaps, as if I'm moving up a level? Or having more respect for myself? Or perhaps, not in a similar victimized position? This also makes me think of privilege. Am I more privileged in a masculine form? Questioning this just makes me see that this too, is a binary thought. Perhaps even a non-nuanced heteronormative thought. Can we categorize privilege, when it comes to gender in such a binary way? Again, I find myself in a state of *dissensus* in my own mind (Rancière, 2009)(Ranciere, 2010). More and more questions arise as I analyze my own work. And I find the unconscious meaning behind my decisions being a layered mystery, no matter how much I dissect them.

It was quiet the entire time. Just like the previous year when I performed *s n a k e*. And this year people's reactions and feedback were similar like the year before: They felt it strongly in their bodies. Perhaps they experienced *affect* (Hovik, 2020). In retrospect I felt like I was sure of my feelings and meaning behind this performance. I was tired of the binaries in society (Butler, 2006) (Butler, 2011). I had reflected upon whether the clothes I wore were comfortable for me and my body since the spring of 2021. And perhaps even earlier, just not as prevalent or consciously.



Picture taken during workshop about Prepositions by Lisbet Skregelid and Helene Illeris

Date: 12th of February 2021

RAVN



Picture taken of hair I've kept since 2019

Time of picture taken: Fall 2021

RAVN

I had already documented how uncomfortable I felt in my clothes, during a workshop on Propositions by Lisbet Skregelid and Helene Illeris, on the 12th of February 2021. I had shoulder length hair at the time. Two years previously, I had cut it short. My hair was longer. And after the first year of studying in the master's program, I decided I wanted to explore more of my queer identity. I went through my things, on an impulse. Like my unconscious mind knew of a hidden object that had to be found and perhaps used in my master's thesis. Like a blind *twofold directedness* (Ahmed 2006, p. 28). And suddenly, I found a long ponytail of hair in a drawer. As if my unconscious mind knew all along that I needed to save it, that it would be useful someday. The mixed emotions of holding this hair in my hands today can be highlighted in Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*:

“Now in living a queer life, the act of going home, or going back to the place I was brought up, has a certain disorienting effect. [...] “the family home” seems so full of traces of heterosexual intimacy that it is hard to take up my place without feeling those traces as points of pressure. In such moments, when bodies do not extend into space, they might feel “out of place” where they have been given “a place.” Such feelings in turn point to other places, even ones that have yet to be inhabited. My own story of orientation makes just such a queer point.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 11-12).

Even though an object is not a place, like a home. I find this object as perhaps an anchor or a symbol of how it was to be in a different home, a different body. Holding this hair brings up the traces of *points of pressure* making me remember how I felt so *out of place*. But perhaps this is how I can today navigate and *orientate* my way through my *path/line* (Ahmed, 2006). Finding my way is the same as feeling at home in my body. Ahmed puts this nicely into words as the following: “The question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we “find our way” but how we come to “feel at home.”” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). Perhaps confronting both the uncomfortable and euphoric feelings is necessary to orientate my way further after this thesis is finished. It certainly has been of importance during this process through my timeline in this thesis.

Now back to the performance 2.0:



Picture taken during exhibition during *Skeive Sørlandsdager 2022*

Date of exhibition: 22nd – 28th of August 2022

RAVN

After the official opening, and the performance, *2.0*, there was an exhibition at the town hall/city hall in Kristiansand, like the year before. The exhibition was from the 22nd – 28th of August 2022, curated by Tove-Mari Odderdal and was in cooperation with *Skeive Sørlandsdager*. This year I decided to create an installation of the performance videos *Samson & Delilah* and *Shampoo Euphoria* on a table with the blue dress, that I wore last year. I decided to cut up the dress. Two slits down each side. Again, the meaning of dualism was utilized. And to me, my feelings about the dress, that I wore the year before, had to be expressed. The urge to *turn towards* a pair of scissors occurred. And I had the idea of cutting up the dress.

5.7 Second Name Change – An Ending or Just the Beginning?

On the 21st of January, 2023, I changed my name again. This time, I took back my last name which I had before I changed it the first time, in 2020. Finally, I've chosen a name, first and last, that I want to have. I have planted roots in this name, one might say. However, I don't see this as the ending. Even though it is the mark of the ending of my timeline and my thesis. Perhaps, this is just the beginning?

5.8 (UN)DOING GENDER – EXHIBITION & LIVE PERFORMANCE

I plan to have my final part of my practical part of my master's thesis in the form of an exhibition. Here I want to combine several of the artistic work that I have displayed in my analysis. Being *Samson & Delilah* and *Shampoo Euphoria* as the main works. I also plan to start the exhibition of with a live performance of some kind. Maybe, influenced by *Samson & Delilah* and cut the hair off of someone and glue it on myself. However, being I do have a small moustache now, I might have to think differently. Perhaps I can glue on a beard? I plan to live project this simultaneously on a wall, as I perform this live. I also want to project different objects and data I have kept during this process, such as: Hair, Snapchat filter experimentations, clothing, creative writings, voice recordings, toiletries, accessories, childhood pictures and perhaps fragments from my baby book. I have some of this data on my Instagram under the handle @ravn.nvar. I've chosen to apply this data though this way rather than attachments directly in this thesis.

6.0 SUMMERY

In this thesis I have taken you on a transformative journey with the following problem statement:

How can a performative exploration of gender contribute to transform my own identity?

As I read this statement, I question if there is really any clear answer. As I have gone through this thesis, performative exploration and transformation, more and more questions have risen within myself, creating a *gap in the sensible* (Rancière, 2010, p.38). Rancière says the following:

“If there exists a connection between art and politics, it should be cast in terms of dissensus, the very kernel of the aesthetic regime: artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination.”

(Rancière, 2010, p.140).

Perhaps I have provided some lessons or planted some seeds within the reader to dismantle the *heteronormative matrix* within themselves (Butler, 2006). I can only hope. I do find this to be the case for my self. However, as Rancière states, the effects of *dissensus* is not to give

lessons nor have any destination. So where have I ended up? I question if I ever will arrive to such a place in my life that I do no longer have any heteronormativity left in me. And maybe that is not the goal? Perhaps the goal is to continue the journey of exploration. Of continuing to unpack internalized restraining binaries.

Perhaps, through my my emotions, through performativity in everyday life, through *affect*, through *gaps in the sensible*, through performance art, through drag, through performative writing and all the complex fragments of theory and methods that I have explored, have contributed to my transformation of my own identity? Perhaps there is no destination. And maybe that does not matter.

This summery is exactly that, a summery. Not a conclusion. However, If I had to conclude with anything in this thesis. I would conclude with the following quotation, by Ahmed:

“The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition. To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic. Directions are about the magic of arrival. In a way, the work of arrival is forgotten in the very felling that the arrival is magic.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16-17).

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ATTACHMENTS

 Norsk ▾ Liam Eric Bula ▾

[Meldeskjema](#) / [Masteroppgave i kunsthøgskole av Liam Eric Bula](#) / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

  28.04.2023 ▾

Referansenummer 629013	Vurderingstype Standard	Dato 28.04.2023
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Prosjekttittel
Masteroppgave i kunsthøgskole av Liam Eric Bula

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Universitetet i Agder / Fakultet for kunsthøgskole / Institutt for visuelle og sceniske fag

Prosjektansvarlig
Marianne Nødtvedt Knudsen

Student
Liam Eric Bula

Prosjektperiode
01.08.2021 - 02.07.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger
Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag
Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 02.07.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)

Kommentar
OM VURDERINGEN
Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket. Vi har nå vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene.

PUBLISERING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER
Hvis forskningsdeltagere kan kjennes igjen i publikasjoner (direkte eller indirekte), må de få tydelig informasjon om dette.

OM VURDERINGEN
Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket. Vi har nå vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER
Det er institusjonen du er ansatt/student ved som avgjør hvordan du må lagre og sikre data i ditt prosjekt og hvilke databehandlere du kan bruke. Husk å bruke leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med (f.eks. ved skylagring, nettspørreskjema, videosamtale el.).

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Se våre nettsider om hvilke endringer du må melde: <https://sikt.no/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET
Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

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