Open form: exploring queer representation through contemporary performance practice

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Royal College of Art for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

M. Gafarova

26,778 words

Contents

List of Illustrations

Figure 1:   Gafarova, M. *Sandro* (2016) C-type photographic print, 22.2 x 16.7 cm.

Figure 2:   Gafarova, M. *Sandro* (2016) C-type photographic print, 22.2 x 16.7 cm.

Figure 3:   Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 29 x 23.5 cm.

Figure 4:   Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 5:   Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 6:   Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 7:   Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 8:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document). (© Monika Kita)

Figure 9:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document). (© Monika Kita)

Figure 10:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document). (© Monika Kita)

Figure 11:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document).

Figure 12:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document).

Figure 13:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document).

Figure 14:   Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016)*.* Performance*.*
(Photographic document).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of those whose guidance, friendship, wisdom and support carried me through this project, and with whom I shared its journey. In particular, I would like to thank Nicky Coutts, Mel Jordan and Ray Martin.

Abstract

This practice-led research project speaks to the queer body and its ongoing struggle with representation, a body continually facing or enacting its own disappearance. The term *queer* emerged in the 80s and 90s as an act of reclamation. It mobilised against its historical meaning as a site of abuse and social exclusion. In part as a consequence of Judith Butler's internal challenge to feminism, which sought to expand its parameters beyond a naturalised concept of woman, the term came to represent both a positive and negative force in relation to LGBT+ identity. It came to stand for a politics of permanent self-critique. Whereas some LGBT+ rights movements called for visibility and inclusion, seeking rights and assimilation, queer movements troubled these demands. Inviting cohesion while aiming to remain provisional, the term became a 'necessary error' (Butler, 1995). Most critically, its meaning lay in its movement; both in its use as a verb and in the sense that, in being open to permanent contest, it would also need to remain open to permanent transformation.

This project responds to this sense of paradox in the context of contemporary art, exploring the competing demands of visibility and resistance through performance practice. It speaks to an art industry that so often appears incongruous with queer politics and responds to the way in which these politics pressure the industry's normative operations; its normalised exclusivity and exclusions. In doing so, the project asks how art can be otherwise and responds through a series of artworks that lean towards the domain of life. These begin as performances in the exhibition space but unfold into writing, through which the project re-imagines the parameters of performance art and explores the body as a site of representation and reflexivity. These performances situate the dynamic of visibility and invisibility, central to queer

thought, within the dynamic of art and life, exploring the former in material and embodied terms. Further, the project uses this investigation to speak back to queer theory in its recent turn to the body, contributing a speculative proposition for how life and language can meet.

In order to consolidate the chronology through which this project evolved, the thesis moves backwards in time, initially situating the problems to which my practice speaks, then unfolding this practice as a response. The first chapter, *No Single Theory,* examines a history of queer thought in order to situate the problems of visibility and representation for queer identity today. The second, *Impossible Bodies,* briefly ties this to parallel problems in contemporary art, and performance practice more specifically. The third, brief, chapter-interlude, *Typologies,* shows the way in which my artworks make attempts to take on discursive form, while the last chapter unfolds these artworks in writing. Through this process, the project examines the political legacies of contemporary art and attempts to draw on these to imagine novel ways in which art can be lived. In doing so, it seeks to hold on to these legacies as an important resource for queer art and activism, opening a dialogue between the shared political urgencies of aesthetic and queer theories today, both of which question the nature of value and seek to transform it.

Figure 1: Gafarova, M. *Sandro* (2016) C-type photographic print, 22.2 x 16.7 cm.

Introduction

This research project began with an investigation into gender and embodiment through a series of performances. In these performances, I explored the possibility of becoming or inhabiting men I had recently met. Some of these men were asked to occupy exhibition spaces in place of me, while others were interventions; attempts to wrap myself and a male participant in an encounter so that we might briefly be drawn into connection. Through these actions, I wanted to engage with gender-non-conforming experience in real, embodied terms, searching for a visual language for something that was both personally difficult to put into words and culturally under-represented. My intention was to pause within this scene of encounter with another, within the desire to become this particular other, in a way that might echo a work such as Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999), a film based on the novel *Billy Budd* (1962), in which Denis explores the intersubjective encounter between two bodies through the full scope of human ambiguity, rather than the limited lens of identity.

At the same time, these performances also came to question the sphere of contemporary visual art as a space for LGBTQIA+ representation. I found my practice responding to an increasing awareness of the problematic positioning of the queer body within the cultural industries; its inclusion but also its co-option, seeking to navigate the competing demands of visibility and resistance. My practice did so, initially, by moving from photography (the medium with which I arrived to this project) to performance, in order to explore representation as an embodied and problematic act, and later, through the translation of performance into writing. Through the process of writing, I sought to reclaim and re-situate these performances as semi-private and self-contained events, searching for a (nominally impossible) exterior to the exhibition space. In doing so, the project called on the provocation of

the historic avant-gardes to reclaim art as *life praxis[1].* Neither of these gestures

produced a definitive, repeatable proposition for doing so, nor did they seek to

simplify the complexity of such an endeavour - one undertaken in a world where life,

in its bare[2] form, has become the primary source of value extraction. Yet in continuing

to search for a spectre of exteriority to marketisation, this project refuses to accept the

redundancy of this particular form of hope, or to relinquish our volition, as queer

artists, in transforming our relationship to a field we continue to both challenge and

define.

In this way, this project explores two distinct questions, with the second scaffolded

onto a practice responding to the first:

I. How can one inhabit the body of another?

And:

II. If a queer politics of solidarity feels incongruous with art-as-industry, how can

contemporary art practice engage with this paradox?

The first of these questions asks what it might mean to inhabit the body of another,

exploring a physical or psychical entanglement. The second evokes a broader sense of

entanglement, turning to queer politics of interdependence and their implications for

contemporary art. The project asks what it means to position ourselves, as queer

artists, alongside the knowledge of the formative exclusions on which contemporary

art, as an exceptionalist industry, is founded on a global scale. In doing so, it searches

---

[1] This term is used by Josephine Berry to describe the imbrication of art and life sought by the
avant-garde in the 20th century.

[2] In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) Giorgio Agamben develops the
concept of *bare life* to describe the way in which natural or biological life has become the
subject of biopolitical control.

for forms of response and responsibility. Situating this dialogue, between what might be described as queer ethics and contemporary art, constitutes the first contribution to knowledge this research aims to make. Further, in exploring this through the medium of the body, the project calls on the legacy of neo-avant-garde performance art and links this to the anti-capitalist, anti-imperial drive of queer theories. In this way, its second contribution lies in reactivating performance art's capacity to speak alongside, or in resonance with, a queer ethics.

The narrative of the death of the avant-garde in the twentieth century, as encapsulated by Peter Bürger's seminal text *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), described the end of the possibility of art's quest for autonomy. As Evan Mauro writes in *The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics* (2011), this was characterised as "the ultimate failure of avant-gardes to define some sphere of life outside of the commodity world to which they were eventually assimilated" (Mauro, 2011, p. 119). Without seeking to negate the importance and currency of this narrative, as echoed in Andrea Fraser's essay *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005), this project aims to challenge its fixity. In doing so, it situates this problem as *the* ongoing provocation of contemporary art, necessary to its self-conception, in which questions of autonomy from market forces (and thereby questions of art and life) remain definitive, even when life itself appears to be fully enclosed. In doing so, it evokes the concept of the "para-institutional" [3] as an artistic means of both inhabiting and un-inhabiting the institutional interior. Further, it does

---

[3] This is a term used by Tom Holert and Sven Lütticken to describe art practices that both utilise the institutional interior and seek to operate outside it's remit, such as Jonas Staal's New World Summit (2012-2013) or Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International (2012), often in the pursuit of social justice.

so through a practice that does not necessarily presume a dimension of life that precedes it, but explores and activates a form of life in the process of making.

A liveable politic

When queer theory[4] emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, it challenged the way in which gay liberation movements had embraced ideals of assimilation - the separation of 'sexual' and 'structural' revolutionary politics (Duke University GFS, 2019, 28:20). The field drew on Michel Foucault's profound critique of rights and visibility as political goals for queer lives. This included a re-imagining of power as something inherent to any form of enunciation[5]. In this way, the primary mode of address of queer thought was deconstructive, and in the following decades, this unfolded into a seismic critique of queer life under capitalism[6]. Theorists such as Lisa Duggan explored this through the concept of 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2002), while Jasbir Puar introduced the concept of 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2007). Further, queer thought challenged the white, Western subject of LGBT+ rights discourses, re-imagining its subject as extending far beyond the individual, and increasingly beyond the human. For many, the term *queer* came to signal what Gayatri Spivak has called a 'strategic essentialism'[7]. And yet, on the ground, questions of rights, representation, and survival remained. As Jackie Wang has contended: 'When all avenues of visibility

---

[4] Throughout this project the term 'queer theory' is used interchangeably with 'queer theories'. The latter is proposed by Lorenzo Bernini (2020) as a more accurate reflection of the plurality of queer thought. Yet the former allows this project to imagine and speak to queer theorising as a unified field, which, in many ways, it also represents.

[5] Michel Foucault's analysis of power spans the body of his work but is most prominent in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977).

[6] A foundational text to this critique was *Capitalism and Gay Identity* by John D'Emilio (1983).

[7] Spivak uses this term to describe a method of provisionally grouping disparate identities under a potentially essentialising name for political ends.

are critiqued for being reformist, liberal, or assimilationist, how are queers supposed to formulate a politic that is liveable?' (Wang, 2010b).

In attending to the tensions and demands posed by this question, this project speaks alongside contemporary queer theories in exploring a series of others. It asks: how can we both continue to occupy a position of political negativity and attend to questions of queer survival? And, how can we do so from within the sphere of contemporary art, a vast 'knowledge economy' (Holert, 2020)[8], within which the politics of visibility for marginalized bodies feel increasingly complex, where queer subjects are nominally welcome yet structurally and geopolitically excluded?[9] How can an art practice, attuned to the 'impossible' coalition of queer politics and contemporary-art-as-industry, continue to utilize and explore art's political legacies for the purpose of this survival? Specifically, this project enquires from within an expanded performance practice. In doing so, it draws on the critical political legacies of performance art in order to re-imagine ways in which meaning can be made with and through the body. To echo the seminal performance theorist Peggy Phelan, the project seeks to re-activate dialogues around the political force of performance and where this may lie (Phelan, 2003, p. 135). It wonders, alongside Phelan, what kind of place art would need to occupy in our lives in order for it to be an ongoing, transformative relation of self-reflexivity, rather than the formula envisioned by Marina Vishmidt to describe the art-industrial complex today: 'from function, to value' (Ima-Abasi Okon in conversation with Marina Vishmidt, 2019).

---

[8] Holert explores this phenomenon in depth in *Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics* (2020), where he unfolds how and why art is now a central resource for cognitive capitalism (Holert, 2020, p. 18).

[9] If 'queer' is not defined solely in terms of individual identity but, as Jasbir Puar contends, must align itself with 'racialized populations' (Puar, 2017 p. xxi) outside the umbrella of liberal inclusion.

Anywhere or not at all

The practice contained in this project positions itself primarily in the context of

performance, but situates itself more broadly within contemporary art. In doing so, it

envisions itself in relation to what Peter Osborne refers to as the 'post-conceptual'

(Osborne, 2013, p. 19). Through this term he describes the way in which some art

practices today sustain a dialogue with the legacies of conceptualism (and the many

challenges it brought to art's the material basis). In his book *Anywhere Or Not At All:*

Philosophy of Contemporary Art (2013) Osborne imagines the conditions within which

contemporary art today labours, three of which are particularly relevant to this

project: the 'expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art' (Osborne,

2013, p. 48), the 'radically distributive... unity of the individual artworks across the

totality of its multiple material instantiations' (Osborne, 2013, p. 48) and the ongoing

'malleability of the borders of this unity' (Osborne, 2013, p. 48). A central concern of

this project, likewise, is how a process of representation can take place within an

imaginary of art where anything is both illimitably possible (due to anything being

acceptable within its remit) and increasingly impossible (due to art's loss of

dimension; its absent exteriority).

The central aesthetic dynamic into which this project inquiries is that of *art and life*,

which I explore through performance practice and autobiographical writing. This

dynamic is then put into dialogue with that of *visibility and invisibility*, which is central

to queer politics. This allows the project to explore the latter in relation to a parallel

sense of paradox in the realm of aesthetics. The conversation between art and life is

contextualised, further, in the legacy of Theodore Adorno. Today this legacy continues

to be mobilised by theorists such as Jacques Ranciere, Peter Osborne, Josephine Berry

and Sven Lutticken, among others, for whom an Adornian cosmology of art still

remains a vital tool through which to imagine its political potential. Following Adorno, the project imagines art through the concept of *autonomy*:[10] the proposition of art's rupture with industry and commodity.[11] It considers autonomy as the necessary, ongoing question and horizon for art today, even as any purported freedom from market forces is no longer an actionable reality. As Sven Lutticken contends in his book *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice After Autonomy* (2017), art must continue searching for the illusive conditions of this concept, as the uncritical assumption of art's autonomy 'ultimately leads to aesthetic attrition.' (Lutticken, 2017, p. 14). Today 'art is post-autonomous', he adds, 'but this only turns autonomy into an all the more urgent promise and problem' (Lutticken, 2017, p. 14). This project responds by searching for new representational platforms for art's autonomy within the remit of life, reiterating the gesture of the neo-avant-garde[12] in moving into the outer reaches of the representational in order to search for new ground for art's relative, increasingly difficult freedoms. The artworks leading this project re-engage with life in order to re-imagine aesthetic platforms in which alterity can be (momentarily, provisionally) contained; where marginalised and queer experience can be reclaimed and explored. In doing so, they attempt to offer an example of something that feels both impossible[13] and necessary for art today - platforms for reflection, freedom and

---

[10] The concept of artistic autonomy was central to the work of Theodore Adorno. For him, this was part of the dynamic of art's autonomy and heteronomy, its concurrent dependence on and independence from the social. This dialectical understanding of the concept profoundly differs from that of autonomy as self-referentiality, or medium specificity.

[11] As Peter Osborne writes, the history of modern art, for Adorno, was the history of its struggle with the commodity form (Osborne, 2018, p. 66).

[12] The *neo-avant-garde* are evoked, in this project, as the generations of artists working in the 50s and 60s, predominantly in North America, who drew on the political legacies of avant-garde art practices of the 10s and 20s in their desire to reconnect art with life.

[13] This claim to the impossible or unrealistic is significant to the project, however, because this claim to the unrealistic is an important political resource. As Judith Butler argues in relation to

visibility untethered from capitalistic extractionism. Further, these artworks use this dynamic as a way of re-introducing dimensionality into contemporary art today; a sphere baring 'no outside anymore' (Berry, 2018, p. 272).[14]

At the same time, this project also contends with a parallel concern, articulated by Josephine Berry in her book *Art and (Bare) Life* (2018), that these challenges to, and openings within, normative modes of visibility should prove to be something other than an extension of art's 'dialectical motor' (2018, p. 31), through which art continues to mirror biopolitical extractionism by subsuming life *as art* (2018, p. 4). This project seeks to ask, alongside Berry, how art can resist this ongoing, 'illimitable' (2018, p. 4) closure to value, and remain, or pause, on the side of *life.* This question is vital for a practice exploring queer and marginalised experience in the remit of contemporary art. It concerns the ongoing possibility of an Adornian, negative dialectics, described by Peter Thompson as contravening Hegel's dialectics of 'identity of identity and non-identity' with a 'non-identity of identity and non-identity' (Thompson, 2013) - a vision of art resisting closure. In order to do so, these artworks seek to remain mobile, not only leaning into process and temporality, but also looking to remain transitory. The problem that this engenders, the fact that these works become difficult to see, difficult delineate as art, and difficult to frame, becomes central to this project. Because of this, although not coming to the project with the intention or skill of writing, the writing through which I came to hold the performances became vital, without which my actions would remain largely private.

---

their work on non-violence; 'unrealistic and useless, yes, but [it allows] a way of bringing another reality into being.... the "unrealism" of such an imaginary is its strength' (Butler, 2020).
[14] As Andrea Fraser argues in her seminal text *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005) the Duchampian gesture of nomination has expanded so exponentially that nothing can be imagined to exist outside the remit of art-world commodification.

Finally, in speaking from the body, this project also speaks to a concurrent dimension of contemporary queer theory; its affective turns, which return to the body and sensation as sites of meaning. Over the last number of decades these theories have troubled the silence and absence of the body within the work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. In doing so, Lauren Berlant describes that queer thought has largely 'morphed into effect studies' (Berlant, 2011), leaning into 'emotions and tactile knowings' (Berlant, 2011). Alongside queer theory's 'negative' turns,[15] these moved queer theorising from an emphasis on 'sexual or gendered injury' (Puar, 2007, p. 236) towards an expansive vision of collectivity and belonging, conceiving the political meaning of *queer* in relation to affect (as the pre- and meta- individual site of collective, embodied knowledge). The project seeks to speak alongside these dialogues, while, at the same time, extending their critique - contending that the body as it appears in the realm of art (as an equally strange and complex assemblage) is still largely absent from queer theorising.[16]

The project seeks to speak alongside the body, in this way, by utilising what Tom Holert describes, quoting Susan Buck-Morss, as 'the body's form of critical cognition' (Holert, 2020, p. 61). It speaks to these affective turns by exploring, through performance, a specific aspect of gender non-conforming experience: failure. As performance theorist Julian Carter describes, '[in] phobic constructions of transsexuality... we who are transsexual are always imagined in terms of our embodiment as failure to be something we are not, yet are required to aspire to be' (Trans/Arts, 2013, 21:12). The artworks leading this project explore both the desire

[15] The 'anti-social' or 'negative' turns in queer thought problematise the relationship of sex/sexuality to the radical, emancipatory politics of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. These theories contend that sex cannot simply be seized as a political object (Bernini, 2021, p. 135).
[16] This 'negative ontology' is explored by Peter Osborne, as 'lineages of negation' (Osborne, 2002, p. 18) in his book *Conceptual Art* (2002).

and the failure to inhabit the body of another. These artworks attempt to give this failure tangible form by literalising it; by exploring the possibility of becoming another in real, embodied terms, lending it an embodied vocabulary. They explore what it might mean to be replaced by another body, joined to another body, or to incorporate another body into one's own, moving through questions of subjectivity and corporeality. These attempts lead to inevitable failures, and these failures materialise something in terms that are not only those of language - they echo performance art more widely as a means of literalising affective experience as embodied experience. In doing so, the project reclaims this failure and contends that it is in this sense that representation remains a necessary question and concern for art.

Chronology

The practice and the writing made during this project did not take place concurrently. I began by asking questions through practice, then turned to writing in order to give these questions discursive form. I then returned to these artworks and consolidated them as written texts in order to make them available to the project. In creating a sequence for this thesis, however, I placed this theoretical context towards the start of this project in order to reflect the fact that it was here - in framing this work in relationship to histories of queer thought - that this project began as such. It was here that my questions concerning the representation of queer experience took on a broader meaning.

Further, the same chronology applies to the artworks themselves and the way in which they arrived into written form. As my performances initially unfolded, some were partially recorded and others not at all, some photographed and others only briefly set down as notes. I therefore realised that their entry into the project would

not be straight forward. They would need to find a material support. To do so, I initially attempted to fold the sequence of artworks into a typology. Because pattern had been an important element of these works I explored the possibility of this becoming the very structure of the thesis. Yet what was finally most needed was narrative. In narrative. these works found the continuity so important to their intelligibility. Further, this tethered them to another life - that of the written form - which articulated, yet did not fully subsume, these performances.

The primary method of writing these artworks into being therefore became autobiographical, or autoethnographic. In this writing I pull myself through my memories, experiences and intentions in the first person, returning these artworks to the life in which they were embedded. In this way the project speaks alongside wider, recent turns within queer theories to the auto- and confessional (via authors such as Maggie Nelson, Paul Preciado, T. Fleischmann, Juliet Jacques). These writers continue the reclaiming and repairing of lost, collective histories, which remains the vital work of feminist, LGBTQI+ and decolonial thought: resisting delegitimization and choosing one's own genealogies. This is one way in which queer thought continues to move between negative and affirmative politics, both acknowledging the dangers of identity-thinking and forging the necessary work of reclaiming one's voice - performing a 'restitution' of identity (Berry, 2018, p. 267). This may not always feel possible, but as Juliet Jacques writes in her memoir *Trans* (2015), which began as a column in the Guardian, the kind of writing she was producing felt anachronistic - impossible - but she did it anyway.

However, the project also acknowledges that the imbrication of the personal and political, so vital for feminist movements of earlier decades, is indeed no longer possible in the same sense, in a present where the biopolitical reach of power extends

to the most intimate and affective of experiences; a reach defined by the fact that these experiences are today the very spaces through which power operates (Berry, 2018, pp. 11-34). Rather, the project speaks alongside queer thought and third wave feminism in, as described by Jackie Stacey, an attempt to 're-ignite the political energies of the 60s, not by mimicking them, but rather by locating politics on the other side of the personal - in the production of subjectivity' (CPC Centre for Postdigital Cultures, 2022, 6:52)*. The way this project understands and carries this forward is by writing autobiographically, but bracketing this within an expanded performance practice. In this way, the writing does not seek to draw on a life outside of its mediation through art, but create the conditions in which a subjectivity takes form.

In this way, these texts attempt to speak beside the literary forms of contemporary authors such as Annie Ernaux, Rachel Cusk and Chantal Ackerman in their exploration and troubling of the autobiographical (or fictively-autobiographical) form; their challenge to the sovereignty of the I. This is imagined, alongside Judith Butler and Jackie Stacey, as a form of 'ethical, political self-writing' (CPC Centre for Postdigital Cultures, 2022, 18:11) that challenges the hegemony of the liberal individual. Or, as described by Judith Butler, as an 'ethical resource'; an 'acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and others' (Butler, 2005, p. 63). This is also reflected by the organisation of the thesis, in which each chapter seeks to function as fragment a larger whole. In doing so, the project sustains a series of gaps or interstices that ask the reader to be active in its reception. As such, the thesis leans towards the condition of an installation, echoing Theodore Adorno's emphasis on the fragment as method, or 'anti-system' (Osborne, 2013, p. 59). Rather than offering a linear progression, it seeks to construct itself through what Adorno describes as 'equally weighted, paratactical parts... arranged around a midpoint that they express through their constellation'. (Birnbaum, Wallenstein, 2019, p. 81). Consequently, it aims to trouble identity-

thinking at the level of both content and structure, seeking to become what Mel Jordan has describes as 'twice political' (Radio Papesse, 2010).

Finally, the way that knowledge is held, contained and transmitted by this project is framed by its relationship to J. L Austin's concept of performativity,[17] as well as Barbara Bolt's reconceptualization of the term in relationship to artistic research (2008). As Bolt writes, "performativity offers an alternative model (of research), one that is no longer grounded in the truth as correspondence" (Bolt, 2008, p. 7). The performative paradigm of artistic research suggests, instead, that truth be evaluated in relation to the immanent knowledge that a piece of art brings into being, as its own truth, while continuing to probe questions of rigour in such processes of knowledge production.

Thesis structure

Following the introduction, this thesis is written in five parts. The first, *Methodology and Practice*, takes the reader through the methodologies utilised and explored through my artworks, as well as introducing each element of practice. The next, *No Single Theory,* outlines a history of queer theory in relation to its struggle with visibility within neo-liberal institutions. It begins by considering Michel Foucault and Judith Butler as foundational to queer thought, whose politics shaped its conversations and engendered its ethics. The following section, *Impossible Bodies*, evokes the problems of participation and visibility for the queer body as parallel

---

[17] J. L. Austin's concept of *performative utterance* (1962) describes a mode of speech that differs from descriptive utterance because this speech generates effects that go beyond the page. These enunciations, once spoken, are 'already' part of an action.

problems within contemporary art, looking to artworks by Chantal Ackerman, Steve McQueen and those of contemporary choreographic performance. The following, brief chapter, *Typologies,* unfolds a series of experimental structures through which I initially explored a way of framing and organising my emerging practice. (None of these were eventually used but remain in the project as a sculptural interlude between the writing that precedes and that which follows). The final, fourth chapter contains the writing that brings my performances into this project more fully. This is comprised of five smaller sections, each of which explores one artwork. These are then followed by a conclusion which proposes the specific ways in which these artworks respond to my central research question, looking into how I came to inhabit performance as what I have termed a *life praxis.*

Methodology and Practice

Methodology

A refusal

This project began with a series of performances asking what it might mean to inhabit the body of another. These were tentative, explorative acts made with the support of male participants, in which I explored the possibility of becoming them, searching for ways in which their bodies could take the place of mine, or mine the place of theirs. Most of these took place in the exhibition space in the presence of a live audience. Most were documented, although usually by someone other than myself. Each involved a male participant who I asked either to occupy an exhibition space in place of me, acting as my avatar, or in whose performance I intervened (apart from the very last). My intention, with these gestures, was to explore gender as something that I experienced as relational, which for me came to the fore in my encounters with the bodies of others (yet nevertheless felt deeply inscribed within my own). I wanted to ground my lived sense gender identity, and struggle with this identity, in its embodied, material dimension, rather than its conceptual or social implications.

These performances drew on a project made some years prior in which I explored my relationship with the male body through the medium of photography. In this work, I took photographs of people I perceived to be male on walks through the city. I chose those, who, for me, represented a masculine archetype or ideal. Before taking their picture I often briefly followed them, and this became an integral aspect of the work. Falling into step with them was a moment of surrender or deferral that meant that my body was tied to theirs before the image was taken. (It was in this sense that I later imagined the participants in my performances as avatars; bodies through which I could move.) During the first year of this project, I found myself returning to this practice but doing so without a camera. I had no clear intention for this work but wanted to return to a practice I had never put into words, which felt both potent and

unresolved. What I did have, in the context of the research project, was continuing access to the exhibition space through participation in group shows and events, which were always open to an element of performance. This prompted me to return to the work with no preconceived medial outcome, turning instead to the possibility of exploring the meaning of that work. Each performance, aside from the last, took place in such a context, among other students, in a searching environment open to play and experimentation.

As these performances unfolded, in the process of making, I began to see how their content was decidedly fused to their (emerging) form. I was new to performance and these were uncertain, explorative gestures. They were slight, sometimes barely visible acts from which I was largely absent. Most were barely perceptible as performances; difficult to understand, in the way I imagined them, for any given audience, unless I spoke to them about the work. But in this, I could also feel a sense of refusal at play. I could see myself trying to both give form to something and to refuse this form, to share something and to refuse this space of exchange, and framing this tension became pivotal to the project. What these performances seemed to be struggling against was the pre-determined *locale* of the exhibition space; its enclosing, reifying power alongside its embeddedness within the neoliberal institution. This was not an outright refusal to participate in art-as-industry - I was situated firmly within it - but a felt resistance to what I imagined as the under-examined relationship between this industry, in its difficult-to-establish parameters, and the queer politics of solidarity with those held outside the possibility of participating. This conviction felt intimately sutured to both my own lived experience and the queer subject of my practice. My desire to disinvest these works of visibility, in the very process of their making and conception, was, therefore, something I began to see as a decisive aspect of this work.

These performances enacted this refusal in two ways: first, in the way in which they resisted closure, as performances - seeking to preserve their ephemerality by leaving themselves only partially documented, unannounced or attributable, as artworks, to others. But also, more significantly, in the way in which I chose to position myself within them. Instead of using the space in which they were situated as a stage (as a space within the bounds of which to position something pre-defined), I used it as a tool through which to mediate my encounters with the participants involved. In each performance, I experienced my own presence as a formative aspect of the work (the performances explored and reflected my identity), yet I chose to remain outside the representational frame (even, I argue, in *Fall*, in which I intervened in the live performance of another students work during an evening of performances, but instigated this intervention as a member of the audience). This second refusal was, therefore, a refusal of the spatial and architectural parameters surrounding these works. Rather, I imagined these performances, in some sense, as occurring within me. This was grounded in my sense of the medium as something already radically expanded, beyond any notion of its particular locality in space and time. Performance, as I imagined it in the remit of contemporary art, is something sutured to the body of the artist and therefore perspectivally adrift. Consequently, I wanted to live this imaginary in its most committed sense; as though a *life praxis;* an attempt at an ongoing refusal to close or subsume the work to a physical, representational frame, thereby compelling it to remain in motion. (Even though others and their participation were absolutely central to these performances I nevertheless imagined them as part of an autobiographical practice embedded in my own perspective and its necessary disclosure, which I later found in writing.)

As Dominic Johnson describes in *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (2019) this orientation of the artists towards/within their embodied practice

was central to the neo-avant-garde practices of the 1970s. Quoting Edward Scheer, he writes: 'performance art provokes a crisis of representation as part of its core aesthetic', as, 'by presenting the body (usually of the artist) as the central motif of the artwork, the representational frame of the work is disturbed; its referentiality is disordered by the forceful engagement of the work with the presence of the artist' (Johnson, 2019, p. 4). This, I argue, is one of the most important provocations of performance art, frustrating the representational gesture of the work *a-priori* and thereby inscribing a mode of refusal into its inception. It was through this choice, to work in this particular mode and legacy of performance art, that I sought to address my central research question:

If a queer politics of solidarity feels incongruous with art-as-industry, how can contemporary art practice engage with this paradox?

In beginning this project, this legacy of performance art and its implications of aesthetic crisis felt, to me, like an essential methodology in engaging with this question - not because it provides a clear response, but because this legacy poses a parallel question in aesthetic terms. In choosing to work alongside an imaginary of this legacy, I knew that the sense of representational rupture or failure evoked by the question above would be immanent to my practice; in parallel to the rupture evoked by the evolving meaning of *queer* itself, as a term continually resisting self-definition. This is also the way in which this anti-representational methodology enacts a *queering;* not through resisting a specific form of normativity outside of itself, but through a form of immanent internal rupture. In this way, the legacy of performance art, I argue, is a vital resource for thinking about the paradox of queer participation in neo-liberal economies. By unfolding the dynamics of an art practice that struggles with/against this participation in this industry, the project demonstrates the ongoing

life and relevance of this legacy, bringing it into dialogue with queer ethics (which call on the importance of this questioning).

A reclamation

Finally, the last aspect of my methodology involved the process of writing these performances into being, In writing, what I imagined as these performances became something more intimately and exploratively tied to my life and my body than what the acts themselves had been able to bring into being. The way I imagined them became more expansive than what had been visible to any given audience, allowing me to re-situate them as things sutured to my own body and gaze. Writing therefore acted as a form of reclaiming or re-nomination. Further, this re-nomination was intimately connected to the queer subject of the work. It was a telling of something I had struggled to put into words, in a mode of address that was something other than diaristic. In putting these actions into narrative, I found myself starting to inhabit my voice, and in doing so, reclaim something of my intention in returning to the subject of this work; searching for voice and form through which to explore this particular facet of (my) gender non-conforming experience. In this way, like the performances, this writing was generative; actualising both my relationship to the medium of performance (in allowing me to imagine and situate myself as the subject of my practice) but also, in producing a narrative within which I, as a queer subject, could reclaim the kind of subjective coherence and continuity so often structurally denied to queer lives (i.e. that may necessitate an embodied, rather than linguistic, form of self-reflexivity in the first place).

This echoes artists such as Anne Bean, whose radically expansive practice actively worked against its internal cohesion, becoming, as described by Dominic Johnson,

fundamentally antagonistic to its own 'receptiveness to criticism and historicity' (Johnson, 2018, p. 30), but also, at the same time, sought a self-restitution through various enigmatic, performative forms of reflexivity. Johnson describes that through her practice 'Bean sought to *actualise* herself, not in a final, authentic fashion, but as a perpetual work-in-progress' (Johnson, 2018, p. 30). As he writes, Bean's practice enabled her to 'mediate a problem that curtailed her... subjective coherence' (Johnson, 2018, p. 35). This echoes other feminist artists of the time, such as Ana Mendieta and Valie Export, who, in contrast to many male artists working across performance and conceptualism, sought to affirm their subjectivity, rather than renounce it[18]. As Josephine Berry writes of performance artist Valie Export, Export's work was likewise that of 'self-appropriation' (Berry, 2018, p. 268), which entailed 'the wresting away of male authorial power over the female body through a painful process of literal and symbolic re-inscription.' (Berry, 2018, p. 268). For these three artists, writing was not central to this process, as it became in my own practice, but the broader relay between embodied action and its representation was nevertheless a key methodology.

Latent methods

The other question to which my practice responds, onto which the methodology above is scaffolded, is the following:

How can one inhabit the body of another?

This question is something I continue to ask through my art practice as someone living a gender-non-conforming life, for whom an embodied expression of this has not

---

[18] As argued by Josephine Berry in *Art and (Bare) Life: A Biopolitical Inquiry* (Berry, 2018, p. 268)

always felt possible, or not to the extent that has felt liveable. Behind the methods described above there were therefore also a set of latent methods responding to this preceding question. In my earlier practice, I explored this through photography; through a collection of images that became an expanded self-portrait. I took these on walks through London, searching for people I perceived to be male who for me represented a masculine archetype or ideal. Both the images and the pursuit were methods through which I experienced myself as briefly inhabiting these men. In starting this project I found myself returning to this gesture, asking what this would mean in the realm of performance. In the first performance, I asked a man I had recently met (and in the subsequent work, both him and his friend) to occupy an exhibition space for the duration of an opening. This became the first method I explored in response to the question above; asking participants to occupy the bounds of a performance event and its duration. In doing so, I imagined their bodies to simply stand in for mine, replacing or displacing me. Visually, these performances mirrored those of 'delegated performance'[19]; works such as Ragnar Kjartansson's *Take Me Here by the Dishwasher: Memorial for a Marriage* (2018)*, in which ten musicians occupied a gallery and performed a polyphonic guitar piece over two weeks, or Anthea Hamilton's *The Squash* (2018), in which a single performer in a squash-like costume occupied a gallery at the Tate Britain every day for over six months. In these works, like in my own, the participants appeared 'installed' rather than performing; present but dispossessed.

The difference between these performances and the photographic frame was, of course, that they were now live. This made something possible that had not felt possible in my lens-based practice; the performances were now truly relational. Even

---

[19] This term is used by Claire Bishop to describe art practices in which people are asked or hired to perform on the artists' behalf.

though there was little being actively negotiated between myself and the participants in these initial performances, we were nevertheless entangled in brief, partially planned exchanges. This felt like a more expansive method through which to explore the possibility of becoming another. Here, in seeking to become or inhabit these men, I found myself tentatively exploring the possibility of a relational intentionality; a way of moving together through the process of a (semi-scripted) event. Having discovered this is as a method in the first two performances, in those that followed it became clearer and more explicit. The first of these subsequent works was a brief, unplanned physical altercation with another student in the context of a group show (an action that felt both deeply potent and ethically problematic). In the next, I asked the same participant to re-enact one of his own works under my name, in another exhibition. This performance then produced a different form of entanglement to the prior altercation, now conceptual and contractual rather than visceral. Finally, in the last, which involved only myself and my memory of a man I had once wanted to be (a work no longer situated in the context of a live show) I travelled to a place he had himself once been, in order to explore this entanglement in the form of a psychogeography.

This attempt to bind myself to a particular other through the force of an event was the second 'latent' method of this project. The concept of the Event was significant to all of these performances. Defined by Alain Badiou in relation to its complex chronology (Badiou, 2013), the concept is connected to the appearance of the novel in any given situation. Disrupting existing orders, its power is that of immanent transformation (such as a radical political rupture). In this way, although it may be described as intrinsic to contemporary art in general - in its search for the novel and its attempt to fold the excluded outside into its forms - it was significant to my practice as part of a more specific methodology. It was through the production of something novel, understood as an unwilled, unplanned, or only partially intentional encounter

between me and the participants, that an inter-subjective, inter-bodily exchange became possible. The novelty courted in these works functioned as a third object, to which both of us, to some degree, surrendered our agency. The agency enclosed in this third object – the very fact of the performance, its manifestation – thereby contained an aspect of us both.

Participatory ethics

In this way, most of these performances were inherently participatory, requiring ethical consideration regarding participatory practice. Ethical concerns were already inherent in the work with which I arrived to this project. In my encounters with my photographic subjects, which involved a mediating device (the camera), a power differential was always palpable. Further, the practice involved a search for these subjects, who I sometimes briefly followed. This meant that a consideration of ethics had been intrinsic to my practice. In what could be described as a voyeuristic endeavour, these images required that this voyeurism be a cogent subject of the work, rather than something disavowed. My aim was for this power differential to be explicit, alongside the concurrent mutual sense of vulnerability I experienced in these photographic encounters. In coming to this project and staging these encounters as live events, these ethical concerns moved into the realm of performance, where the mediating structure of the exhibition space (as well as the discursive mediator of the arts institution) produced a similar differential of power to that of the lens. In each performance, my responsibility to my participants was likewise a transparency both in relation to my intentions and expectations for the performances, as well as my personal investment in the work (as far as I was able to articulate at the time). Where I struggled to put this into words, I let the participants know that its subject was not yet resolved. The only live performance that did not conform to this was *Fall,* which

was an unplanned (or not planned to the extent to which it was intrusive and agonistic) intervention in the work of another student during a group show. The ethical implications of this particular work were the most problematic, because the short, physical altercation (in which neither me nor the other student were harmed) was not intended, but one I could have anticipated.

However, although no definitive ethical framework exists for participatory art practice, in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012) Claire Bishop argues for a consideration of the significance of agonism in performance, which remains a vital part of its power and legacy. She writes: 'In insisting upon consensual dialogue, sensitivity to difference risks becoming a new kind of repressive norm - one in which artistic strategies of disruption, intervention or over-identification are immediately ruled out as 'unethical' because all forms of authorship are equated with authority and indicted as totalising. Such a denigration of authorship allows simplistic oppositions to remain in place: active versus passive viewer, egotistical versus collaborative artist, privileged versus needy community, aesthetic complexity versus simple expression, cold autonomy versus convivial community' (Bishop, 2012, p. 25). In *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s* (2018) Dominic Johnsons affirms this imperative, writing that the essence of performance art has always been in its negotiation of a limit - whether bodily (via pain, sex or violence) or that of representation itself. This is the reason that I decided not to exclude *Fall* from this project, although I continue to question its inclusion.

Practice

As outlined above, the practice leading this project responds to two distinct questions. My initial question asks how one can inhabit the body of another, in the realm of performance, as part of an exploration of gender non-conforming experience. The second, scaffolded onto the first, problematises the positioning of this practice within the neoliberal institution. It questions this positioning in relation to a queer politics of solidarity with those held outside of the possibility of participating. The performances attend to the first question through a series of encounters between myself and male participants, while the second question is explored through a conjunction of performance, writing and, finally, print (in the form of a deconstructed book). Through these forms, as well as their continuity, the project seeks ways of negotiating instances of visibility and invisibility; participation and refusal. A significant part of this involves my re-positioning of the initial performances, through the process of writing, into re-claimed narratives that become independent from their initial appearance.

Through this, the project seeks to re-activate the legacy of neo-avant-garde performance art of the 'long 70s'[20], which sought to transform life through art, drawing especially on those feminist artists for whom this transformation involved a subjective reclamation from structural marginalisation (such as Anne Bean, Valie Export and Ana Mendieta). The project seeks to re-activate this legacy as its initial contribution to knowledge. It does so by demonstrating a performance practice in the process of both exploring a queer subject and re-imagining what performance can be; as a mode of embodied self-reflexivity both within and without its institutional frame. Finally, this is brought into contact with a history of queer theories in their attempt to

---

[20] This term refers to the period of time between the late 60s and early 80s that saw wide socio-economic transformations across Europe and the Unites States, in which welfare policies were increasingly replaced by those of neo-liberalism.

problematise and navigate the multiple positions of queer life within the neo-liberal institution. Situating this dialogue, through the project as a whole - between a queer ethics and contemporary art - is the second contribution to knowledge this research project seeks to make.

In total, the practice included in this project consists of a selection of photographs, five performances (alongside photographic and video documentation, as a supplement to the descriptions provided but not as stand-alone pieces of work), a piece of writing, and an unbound book (displayed as an installation as part of the Viva Voce for this thesis). In the section below I briefly introduce each visual element of practice, aside from the written component, and contextualise this within a chronology of the project.

Photography

Sandro (2016) C-type photographic print

This photograph, taken on a phone in the first weeks of this project, demonstrates the kinds of images I collated in my prior work, producing the atlas of the male body. Some of these men, as in this image, were taken from existing imagery encountered outdoors, on walks through the city (such as advertising).

Bevin Court (2016) C-type photographic prints

In the following months, I produced the first work I showed as part of this project; a series of photographs exploring the interior of a constructivist building in central London. I decided to visit the building to spend some time in a space connected to my cultural identity, as someone born (and raised, in early childhood) in Moscow. This was an early piece of work, the subject of which I did not then take into the rest of the project, but something of the experience informed the performances to come. Whereas in my prior photographic practice I imagined myself simply stationed behind the camera, this trip pushed me to reassess my positioning in relation to the images I was producing. I experienced the day as though a ritual; a journey through a physical manifestation of an aspect of my cultural identity. The images produced therefore acted as documents, indexing this ritual and drawing my body and gaze into the meaning of the work.

Figure 2: Gafarova, M. *Sandro* (2016) C-type photographic print, 22.2 x 16.7 cm.

Figure 3: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016). C-type photographic print, 29 x 23.5 cm.

Figure 4: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 5: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016). C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.
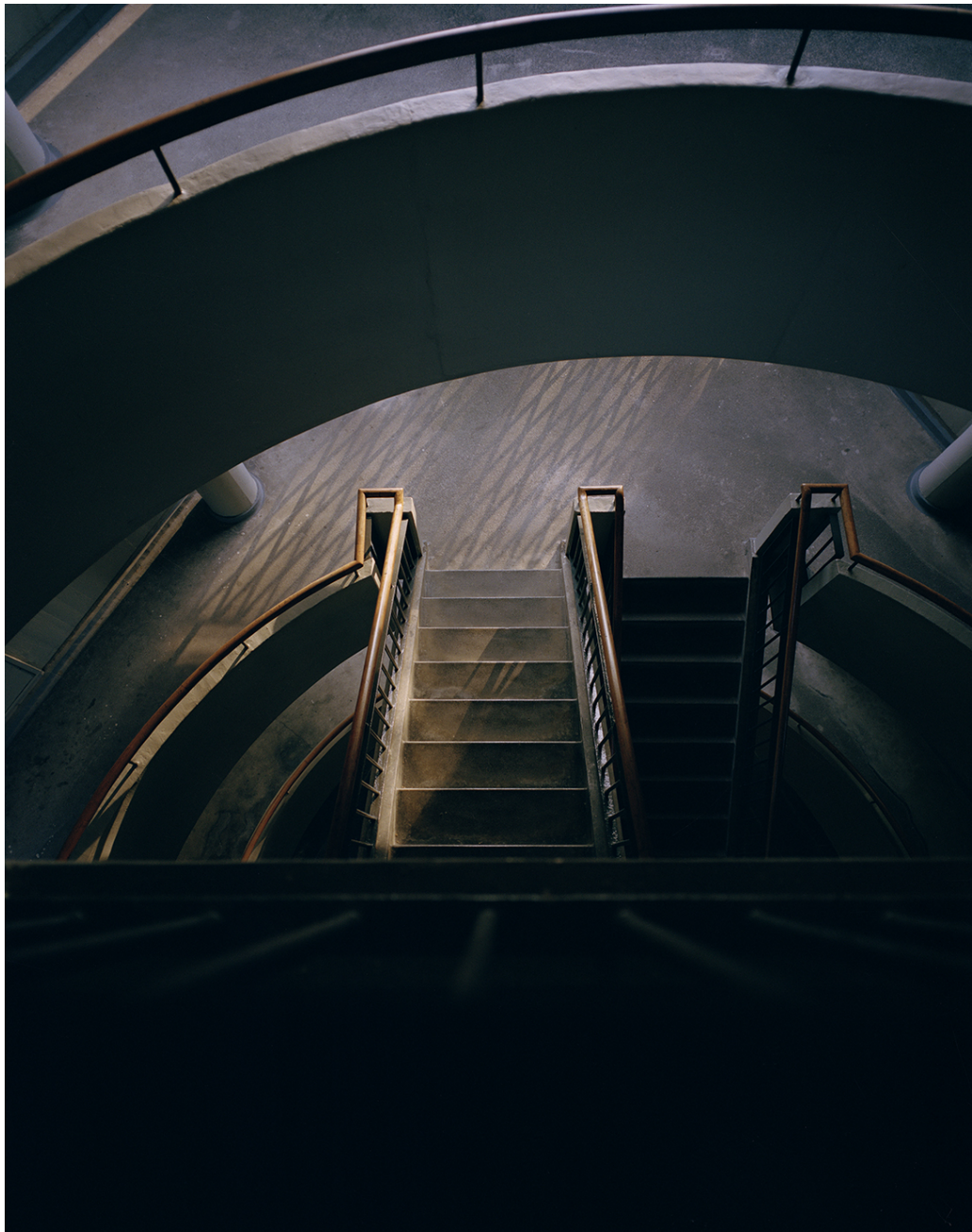
Figure 6: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016)*.* C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Figure 7: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016). C-type photographic print, 23.5 x 29 cm.

Performance

Zweikommasieben magazine I (2016) Performance

Zweikommasieben magazine was the first performance I made as part of this research project. The performance involved Joe, a man I had met a few weeks prior on a walk through London. This brief encounter was pivotal to the project as it pushed me to re-engage with gender as the ongoing charge behind my practice. For this performance, I asked Joe to occupy an exhibition space for the duration of an opening to a group show (lasting approximately three hours). I asked him to sit in the middle of a large repurposed chapel and read a magazine, while being free to move around as much as he needed. My intention was for his body to replace, and therefore stand in for, my own. I took no images of the performance myself but received one still photograph and a video of the opening (from which I later used some still images).

Zweikommasieben magazine II (2016) Performance

In the second performance in which Joe took part, which followed, I asked both him and his friend to occupy another exhibition space, also for the duration of an opening. I likewise gave them some props I had recently found; a pair of mandolins, which I asked them to restring. The connection between the mandolins, the magazine (in the prior performance) and Joe himself, was through music; the magazine explored contemporary club culture while my first conversation with Joe was in a record shop, where he worked. This gave the performances a material, rather than conceptual, token of continuity, which felt important before I was able to put their meaning (and therefore their conceptual continuity) into words. I took a series of photographs of

this performance, mostly of Joe, but otherwise simply remained in the audience, as in *Z. magazine I.*

The following work arose from a week-long performance workshop open to all students at the RCA. This included two visiting lecturers who came in for the week to lead each student through the production of a solo, live performance piece. In the first few days we explored the histories and dimensions of performance art through films and seminars, while in the latter we prepared and finally performed our work. This was done in the context of a large, group event with over twenty participants (alongside more audience members) each of whom performed a piece lasting no more than three minutes, in no particular order (one performance would end, then another student would choose to begin). The room in which these took place did not include any distinguishing features with which to differentiate between audience members and performers; all occupied the same plane and intermingled throughout. With this work, I was now more aware of the function of the exhibition space as a container for performance practice, and starting to explore and question its parameters.

For this performance, I decided to approach some of the male students and audience members at the show and dress them in a selection of jumpers and jackets, in order to initiate a series of short, unscripted encounters. I intended to do so without being seen to be performing; repeating the act as others' performances unfolded. Having understood, through the two prior works, that I was seeking to stage an encounter with the male body, I decided to do so consciously and clearly. On the night, however, I found that both the performers and audience members sitting on the floor, rather than standing, as I had imagined, which made my plan impossible to execute. I therefore

began looking for another way to carry out the action, and with no prior intention to do so, intervened in the work of another student. As another performance was ending, this student entered the room with a small wooden table and a handsaw, climbed onto the table, bent down and began to saw one of its legs. After a few seconds, the table gave way and he fell to the floor. I then approached him from the side with a jumper, holding it in front of me. I did so spontaneously, in a moment when his action produced a profound sense of openness. When I got close enough for him to see me, him having just fallen, he responded by standing to run and elbowing me away, while, in the midst of this, I grabbed his waist and held on. He then took four or five strides to the door with me in tow before we both fell, an encounter that lasted several seconds. After the show ended I approached him to speak about what had happened. One image was taken of this performance by someone documenting the show but was later lost. A drawing included in this project records my memory of the event.

Through this action, more so than the preceding, I understood that what I was seeking to explore was the intersubjective or interbodily encounter between myself and the male body. Although this particular intervention was not intended as it transpired and remains deeply problematic, it was an important turning point for the project. It allowed me to start imagining my own presence and perspective as a feature of my practice, all the while reflecting on what was so important about having made this intervention from the locus of the audience, intercutting the implicit directive not to do so. This transgression included a violation of someone's physical boundaries without their consent and is therefore something I had, and have, no intention of repeating. Yet it produced a counterpoint to my wider imaginary of a performance practice that instantiates and explores other forms of transgression, where distinctions between inside and out, visible and invisible, private and public are continually (and intrinsically) troubled - where, in dialogue with my wider research

question, the performance allowed me to imagine an action that resisted something of the institution interior, although I could not yet name what this was.

Untitled (M. M. Page) (2018) Performance and video documentation

In the months that followed, I came across Matt (who featured in the previous performance) performing in another group show where I was a member of the audience. In this performance I watched him as he broke a brick into rubble and dragged this across the floor with his body, then his face, repeating the gesture multiple times. For my next performance I decided to invite Matt to re-enact a version of this action in an upcoming exhibition. Through his re-enactment, I imagined a different kind of negotiation between us to the one that came prior, something contractual (and consensual) rather than visceral. I asked Matt to re-enact the performance with any number of variations, which he did, adding additional elements to the work on the day. It was these variations that then produced the central gesture of this performance; variations I could not have foreseen, but which I was nevertheless an agent of. As described in the prior chapter, these unforeseen changes, alongside my facilitation of the re-staging this performance, produced another element to our encounter: an event. It was therefore in this way that this performance enacted our co-being, or entanglement. While watching the performance, I felt his body to be both possessed and dispossessed, both his and mine (something he also described as experiencing). And yet, with this work, I also felt a decisive turn to a more conventional form of performance making, no longer dwelling in the confusion (which had felt so productive in the earlier works) about who was performing, who was watching, and how the moment might survive into a future. The performance was filmed by a photographer documenting all works within the show.

Ultan Coil (2019) Performance and video documentation

In this final performance, I departed from the former in the decision to move away from the exhibition space and take a physical journey. This journey would constitute the performance (made for no immediate audience). The male figure in this work was no longer a participant but a memory of someone I used to know, who I had briefly studied with, and remembered wanting to be. I knew almost nothing about him other than the fact that he cycled. His name, Ultan Coil (altered for this project) reminded me of a landscape or a landmark. For this performance I decided to simply go somewhere I knew he had once been, as though walking in his steps would also place me into his body. I remembered how once he told me about starting a cycling route through Europe, from Greenwich. I decided to go to Greenwich and spend the day there with a video camera, filming aspects of my journey.

Through this journey, I reversed the prior gesture of asking a man to occupy a space in which he was contained. Now, the designated space, which represented Ultan in his absence, contained me. As with the very first work made as part of this project (Bevin Court) the film, and film stills, registered my gaze. In this work, I anticipated the outcome to be a text describing the journey (although the film and stills also became part of the project as an additional form of documentation).

Links:

Untitled (M. M. Page)

Link to performance documentation: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/820342486

Ultan Coil

Link to film: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/820318806

Figure 8: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine* (2016)*. Performance. (Photographic document).

(© Monika Kita)

Figure 9: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016)*.* Performance.

(Photographic document). (© Monika Kita)

Figure 10: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016)*.* Performance.

(Photographic document). (© Monika Kita)

Figure 11: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016). Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 12: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2016). Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 13: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2017)*.* Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 14: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2017)*. Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 15: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2017)*. Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 16: Gafarova, M. *Fall (Sketch)* (2017). Ballpoint pen on paper. 21 x 29.7 cm.

Figure 17: Gafarova, M. *Untitled (M. M. Page)* (2018)*. (Stills from video documentation).

Figure 18: Gafarova, M. *Ultan Coil* (2019)*.* Performance. (Stills from video

documentation).

Figure 19: Gafarova, M. *Ultan Coil* (2019)*. Performance. (Stills from video documentation).

Print (unbound book)

Untitled (2023) Installation. Risographic prints on card, wooden railing.

The final element of this project is an unbound book that collates the performance documentation shown above. Through this, I sought to affirm the importance of these documents, but also to move to a different representational platform. In looking to create something cohesive from these disparate images, I used a risograph printer, which placed them onto the same aesthetic plane. Further, in their display, I used multiple series of images to suggest a re-animation, returning them to motion and suggesting a further form of narrative. Finally, the book points to a life for these works within another form of distribution, tracing a line of flight from their initial appearance in the exhibition space to what they are now intended to become: a self-published book.

Figure 20: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

Figure 21: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023)*.* Installation.

Figure 22: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

Figure 23: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

Figure 24: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

Figure 25: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023)*. Installation.

Figure 26: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023)*.* Installation.

Figure 27: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023)*. Installation.

Figure 28: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

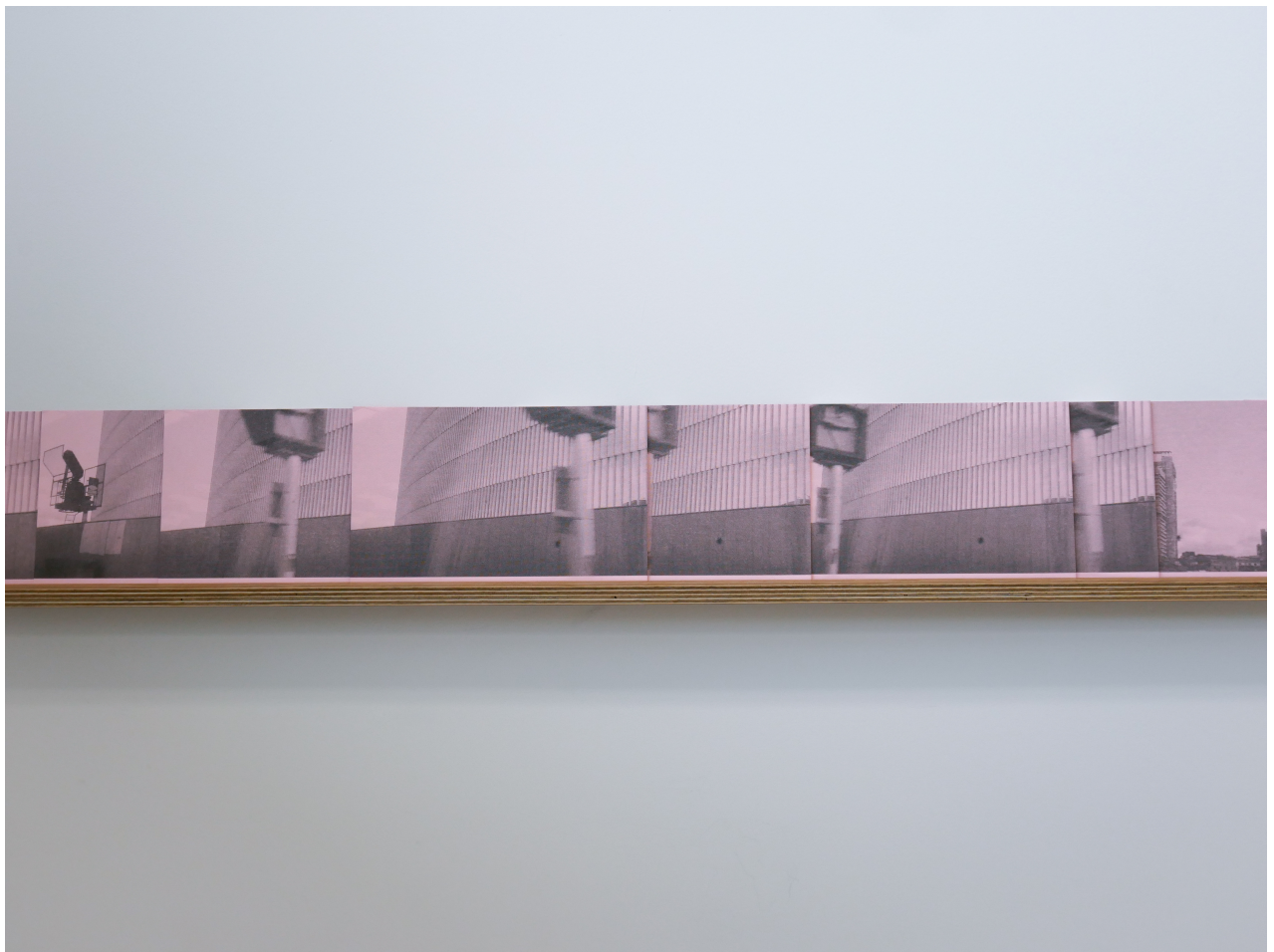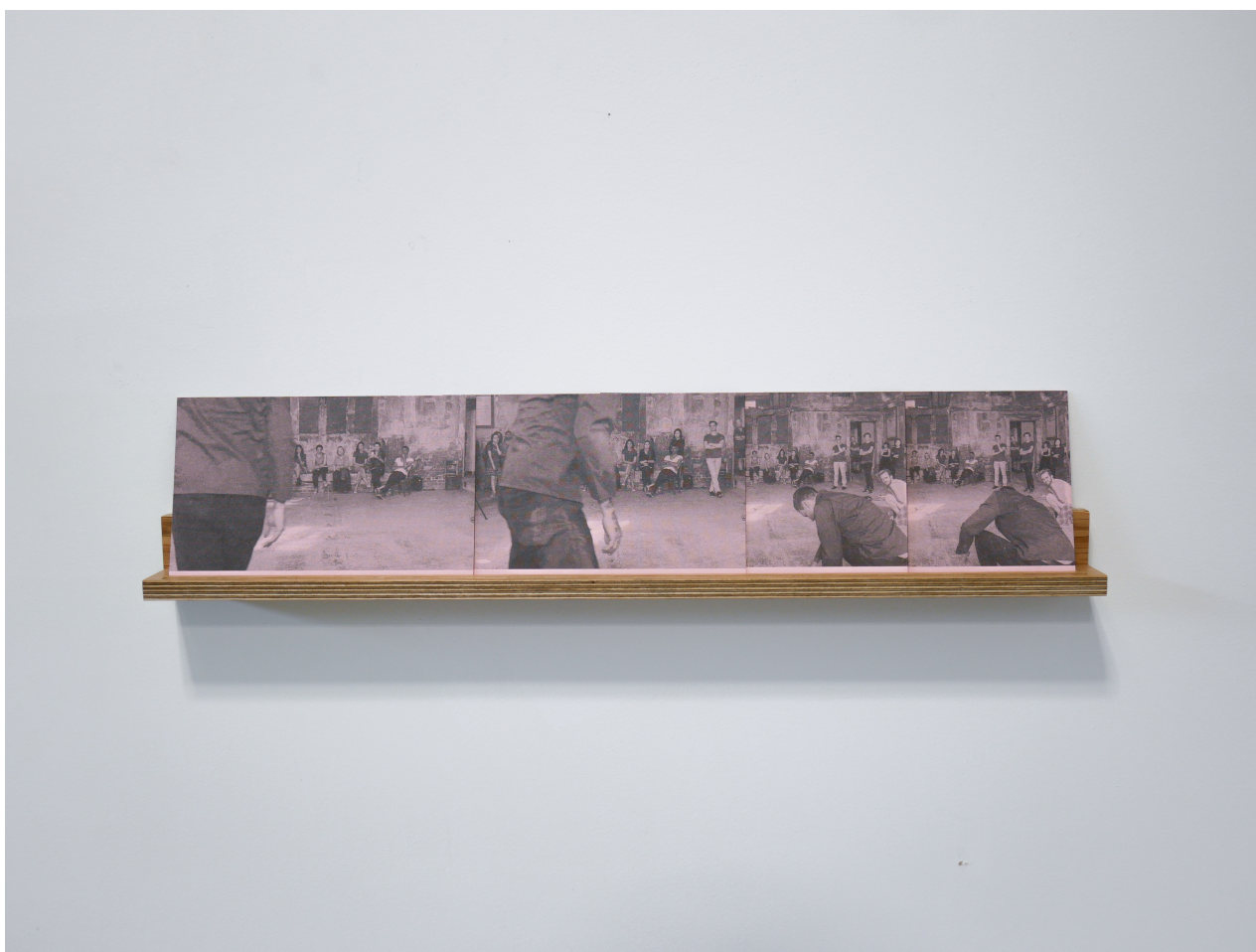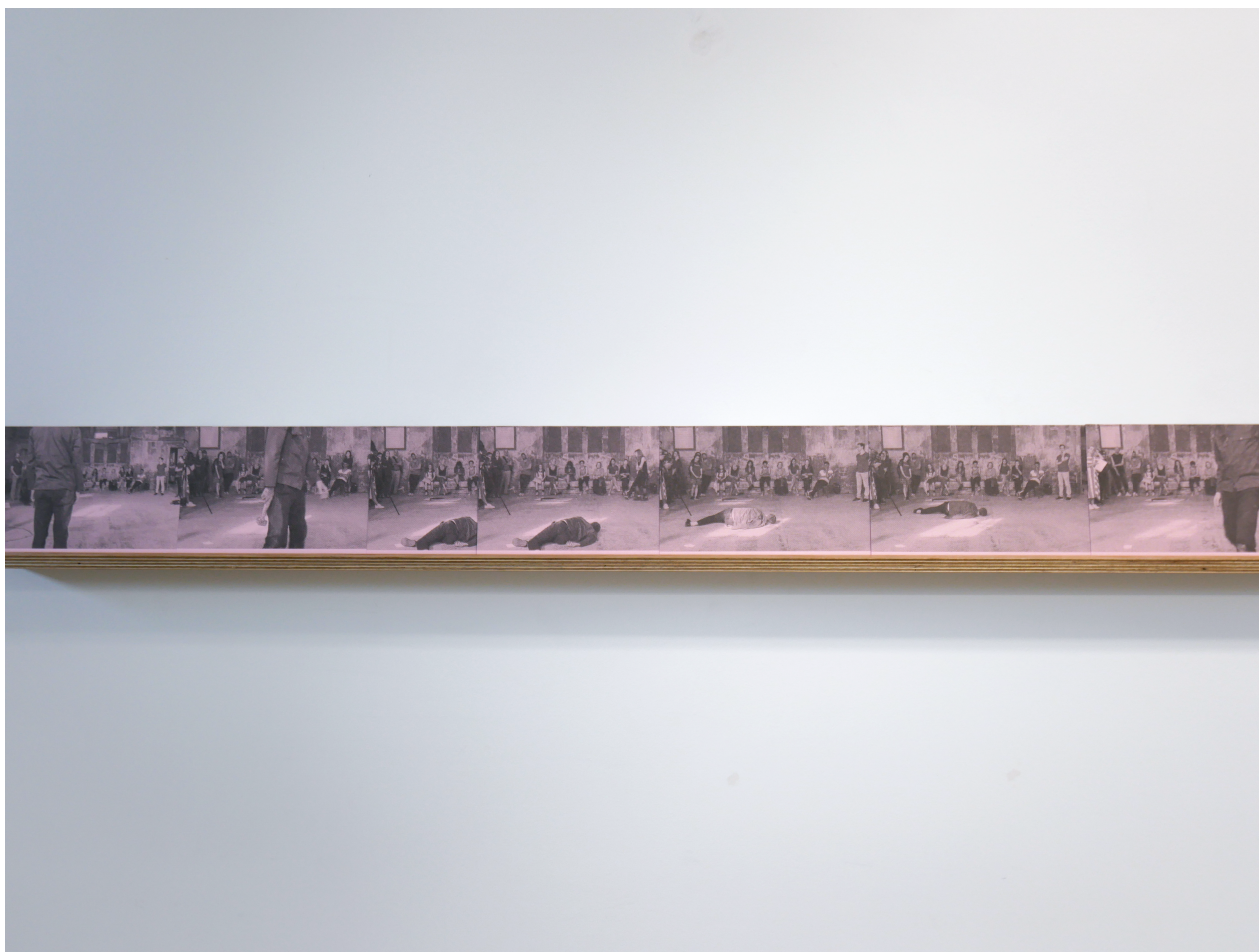Figure 29: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

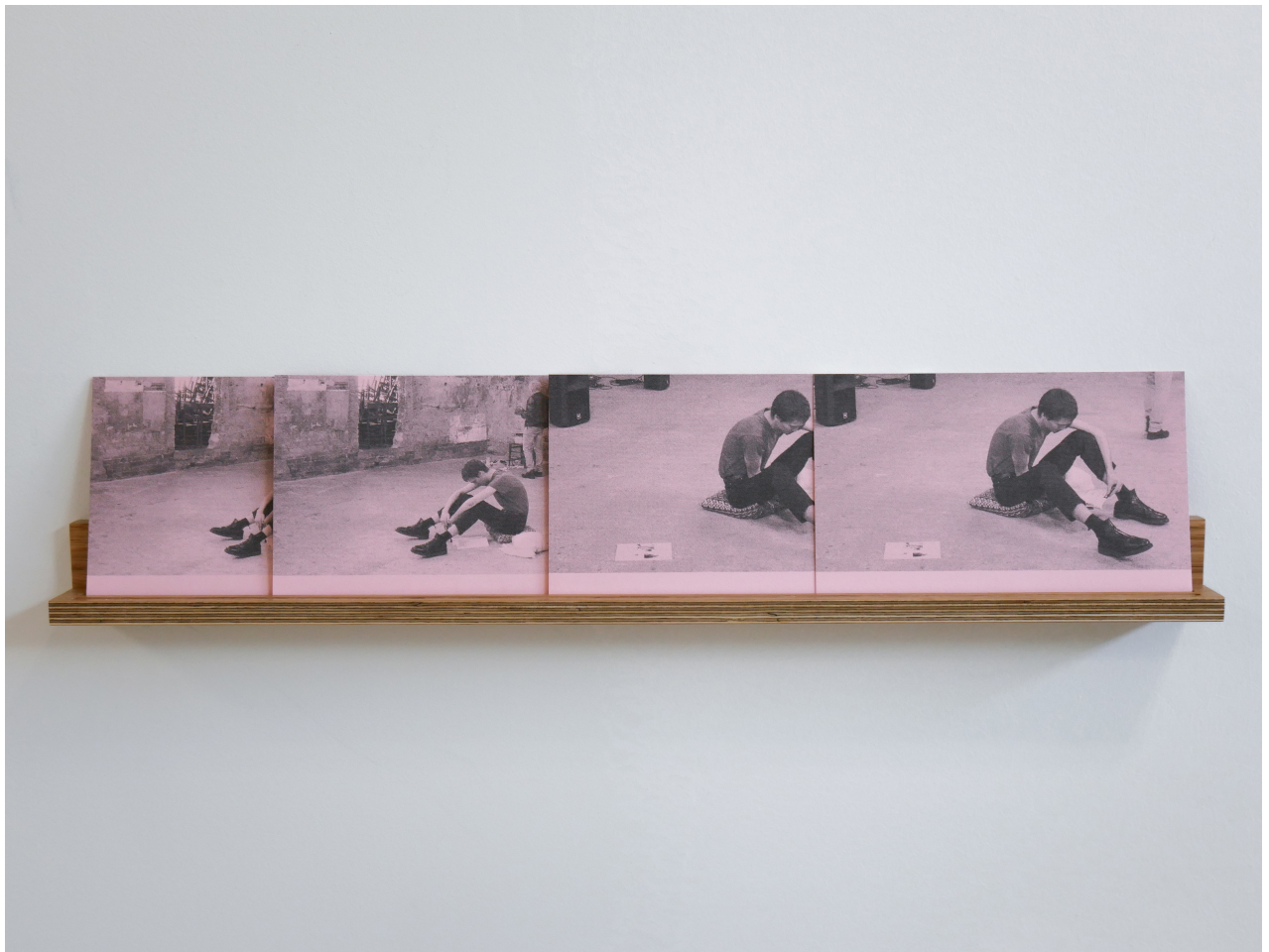Figure 30: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023)*.* Installation.

Figure 31: Gafarova, M. *Untitled* (2023). Installation.

No Single Theory

Queer theory emerged in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a way of centring

sexuality and gender in cultural analysis, building on foundations established by

feminist and gay liberation movements. Like those movements, it acted to politicize

non-normative forms of gender and sexuality and did so in relation to wider questions

of identity, race and class. It sought to challenge the widening assimilation of

LGBTQIA+ bodies in nation and state. In doing so, *queer* became a verb; a tool. In

critical theory, it became the social marker for diverse forms of conceptual negativity,

whether eventually affirmative, in the form of 'masochism, anti-production, self-

destructiveness, abjection, forgetfulness, radical passivity, aggressive negation,

unintelligibility, negativity, punk pugilism and anti-social attitudes' (Wang, 2010a), or

truly negative, as in Lee Edelman's critique of 'reproductive futurity' (Edelman, 2004);

a queerness disrupting all notions of time and identity. In being reclaimed, *queer*

challenged the binary that brought it into being. It acted as a form of Butlerian,

performative resistance; a politics that built on Michel Foucault's unfolding of power

and resistance to the same immanent field. This, for theorists such as Eve Sedgewick,

had been nothing less than 'axiomatic' (Sedgewick, 1990, p. 3), a new ground on which

to found queer resistance, which would now need to draw itself directly from any

machinery of power at play.

The term queer therefore became a site permanent self-contest. As Judith Butler

describes, something 'never fully owned, but always and only redeployed' (Butler,

1996, p. 228). This antagonism was central to queer theorising, yet it also sought to

explore how this could be lived; how to live with, through and alongside a term that

must remain radically provisional to sustain its own meaning. For many, the most

negative forms of queer critique (as in the work of Lee Edelman), or its most strident

rejections of the human and social (as in the work of theorists such as Karan Barad or

Rosi Braidotti) have felt problematic. In a powerful essay critiquing its new materialist

turns, Jordy Rosenberg points to the paradoxical nature of some of the claims developed in the field. He writes; 'rather than understanding sexuality within the porous realm of the social, much recent ontological work has reterritorialized desire within the molecular as if the molecular itself constitutes a kind of productive, autonomous realm' (Rosenberg, 2014, p. 18), a realm tethered to 'putative queerness (and) its inherently resistant nature' (Rosenberg, 2014, p. 8). For Rosenberg, what becomes lost when the queer body is untethered from its referent in the social is the complexity of its beginnings; the paradox that sustains its critical potential. This critique echoed an earlier one; Gayatri Spivak's *Can The Subaltern Speak*? (1988), in which Spivak challenged what she saw as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze' abdication from speaking, or allowing theory to speak, in the name of those deemed voiceless; an abdication from representational politics.

Cutting across these divisions, however, has been the wider turn, across queer theory, to the body, to affect, sense and sensation. Here, the critical emphasis has been methodological rather than conceptual, pushing queer thought to re-imagine its relationship to language and meaning, apprehending the human in this concrete guise, rather than that of the concept. Further, as Jasbir Puar describes, this is the way in which theorists have responded to the diminishing significance of individual identity for queer critique, coupled with the ongoing need to imagine new forms of 'belonging, connectivity and intimacy' (Puar, 2007, p. 208). In this way, queer theory continues to respond to the problematic outlined above; shifting its modes of representation - its modes of meaning making - rather than negating the necessity of this altogether. In the following essay I briefly trace this movement towards the body, initially showing the broader development of queer theory as a field, then turning to the critique of Butler and Foucault, which became pivotal to these turns. In doing so, this chapter frames the concerns that came to be pivotal to examining my own art practice; how a

queer body can respond to the representational paradox imbricated in its politics, and further, how a response can itself be embodied.

Foucault and Butler: radical constructivism

In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977), Michel Foucault introduced a theory of power now pivotal to queer politics. In this text, Foucault contended that power is something far more complex than previously imagined, tied to capacity rather than violence. Essential to his analysis was the assertion that whereas violence reduces the body to passivity, power acts through the body's own actions. In doing so, his work offered an image of power that shapes and engenders not only the actions it compels, but the bodies through which it moves. Rather than a simply force to be liberated, sexuality - as a cultural and political sphere through which power is enacted - became, in and through his work, a significant site of inquiry, tracing the many ways in which the very concept produces us in subjugation.

In 1990, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* offered a powerful extension to these insights, bringing them to bear on the concept of gender as something just as deeply embedded in our sense of being and belonging as sexual identity. Butler's work unhinged gender from biological sex, pulling it into view as both social and material. This imaginary of gender described it as both deeply individual and radically contingent, dependent on a world of others, their language and their repetitions - unintelligible without this world. Following Foucault, Butler's provocation was that if the concept of woman grounds feminism, then it would be a mistake to think past the relational formation of this ground - to use it as a naturalised concept with which to confront patriarchy rather than analysing it as the very space in which patriarchal subjugation becomes

established. Butler argued that this critique, rather than a denial of the lived and material existence of womanhood, acknowledges something crucial about gendered existence: its primary, formative hold over us, rather than simply our wielding of it.

In this way, Butler inherited and developed what Lorenzo Bernini describes as the next paradigm of queer thought: radical constructivism (Bernini, 2021, p. 124). This was grounded in a novel conception of the subject, consistent with broader post-structuralist theory, which imagined the subject as *ecstatic*[21] - fundamentally shaped by history and sociality, an existence radically preceding its essence. As Bernini describes, whereas gay liberation movements of the 1970s attempted to challenge the repression of sexuality to liberate an originary and authentic sexual subject, Foucault and Butler challenged the liberal, humanist conception of the self at the heart of the these demands. What had been a transcendental being seen to precede the repression against which it railed became a subject formed in and through power - through its interpellation[22]. As a consequence, the work of feminism, for Butler, would be deconstructive. Rather than using a bounded and naturalised concept of woman to oppose patriarchy, Butler argued that a primary objective of feminism should be to examine how the notion of gender is formed - and performed.[23]

---

[21] This concept refers to an idea of the subject as something foundationally relational. Judith Butler explores this concept in her book *Undoing Gender* (2015), in which they use grief to examine intersubjectivity.

[22] In Marxist theory, interpellation is a concept describing the way in which we encounter and internalise the values of culture and ideology.

[23] The most important consequence of this turn was its effect on notions of resistance. As Bernini describes, after Foucault, there could no longer be a definitive revolutionary act (Bernini, 2021, p. 129). Rather, resistance would need to be ongoing and deconstructive.

Through their theory of subversive performativity, Butler developed a framework for re-inscribing the gender non-conforming body into public discourse in a way that allowed for its restitution. Their well-known example of this is drag - an enactment of gendered norms that integrates the gender non-conforming body into those very norms - as depicted in the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston, 1990). However, as Butler later reflected (1992), it was not drag itself that struck them as potently subversive, but rather the house system of the queens, which restructured heteronormative family models into alternative forms of kinship and belonging. These houses both mimicked and re-imagined kinship in response to the homophobic violence and racialised poverty that enveloped the participants' lives beyond the ball.

Emergence of queer theory

'Queer theory' emerged in conjunction with *Gender Trouble*. The term aimed to re-politicise LGBT+ politics under the weight of race and class - to turn sexuality into a terrain for problematising power rather than seeking to securitize rights. As Teresa de Lauretis described in the first conference to use the term *queer*, the task of queer theorising would be to do 'the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences' (de Lauretis, 1991, p. iii-iv) [24]. Rather than speaking to an exteriorised force of oppression, queer theories unfolded the Foucauldian/Butlerian project of immanent critique, questioning and problematising their own conditions of visibility - the mechanisms through which lesbian and gay liberation movements had been sustained in the West - and in doing so, addressing their collusion with power. When *queer* was subjected to a resignification, therefore, it was not simply the negative of a dialectic redeployed against a particular norm or set

---

[24] This fact and adjoining quote are both drawn from Lorenzo Bernini's *Queer Theories* (2021, p. 110).

of norms, but what Butler describes as a fissure at the heart of the normative. Further, for Jack Halberstam, what characterised emerging queer thought was the profound breadth of its reach; its probing of relations between 'nationalism and norms, sexuality and terror, identity and repetition, race and disidentification, sexuality and death, pessimism and optimism, negativity and utopia, recognition and failure', adding that, nevertheless, 'no single theory of norms unites these works, either through their embrace of the antinormative or through their understanding of the political' (Halberstam, 2015).

A critique of capitalism, however, remained central to queer theories[25]. The concepts that became central to this critique were homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) and later, homonationalism (Puar, 2007). These concepts addressed the foundational structures that supported LGBT+ existence and visibility - capitalism and the Western (initially U.S.) nation state - and explored the complexity and contradictions of these relationships. Theorists such as Duggan and Puar positioned the queer subject as thoroughly embedded in, and implicated by, structures of power and oppression, understanding the theoretical project of queer theories as inseparable from the task of confronting ongoing economic and social injustices. This included an understanding that, within neoliberalism, LGBT+ bodies had become instrumentalised; that queer lives were now inscribed in the drawing of new parameters of inclusion and exclusion - in the work of 'necropolitics' (Puar, 2007, pp. 32–79). As argued by Puar, although some of the battles for LGBT+ rights had been won, the conditions on which these rights rested were embedded in the same fields of power in which structural racism sustained western economies.

---

[25] A foundational text for this critique was John D'Emilio's 'Capitalism and Gay Identity' (1983).

Published in the wake of 9/11, Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* expanded on Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity to further critique the subsumption (and geopolitical weaponisation) of queer bodies by the U.S. nation state. Puar's book challenged the idea, prevalent in the 1990s, that the nation state is fundamentally heteronormative and that the queer subject is always an alien within it (Novara Media, 2017, 01:30). Instead, the book proposed the concept of homonationalism as a lens through which to view the investment of western states in the production of queer subjectivities as new biopolitical subjects. As described by Puar, whereas queer bodies came to constitute new sites of value extraction, others came to hold the negativity that gays and lesbians formerly embodied: primarily, 'orientalised Muslim bodies' (Puar, 2007, p. 163). In this way, the concept allowed Puar to name a transition. As she describes, the term is 'not a synonym for gay racism or another way to critique the 'conservatisation' of gay and lesbian identities, but instead an analytic for apprehending the consequences of the successes of the LGBT movement' (Puar, 2021). One of these consequences is, she asserts, that queer bodies are no longer, as they had been, 'cathected to death' (Puar, 2007, p. 32), but increasingly demonstrative of the biopolitical optimisation of life.

Negative and affective turns

Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* spoke alongside a host of other theorists turning increasingly towards a negative paradigm for queer thought, one in which a radical queer politics would no longer predicate itself on the non-normative sexual or gendered body. Rather, this turn called into question that very connection. As Lorenzo Bernini describes, although Puar spoke within the same analytic framework as Butler and Foucault, her work marked a shift in reappraising their political project (Bernini, 2021, p. 142). Like the 'radical constructivist' (Bernini, 2021, p. 11) framework,

Terrorist Assemblages sought to analyse the formation of queer subjectivity in relation to vectors of power within the U.S. nation state, enacting a mode of deconstructive, queer critique. Unlike that framework, however, the book challenged what Puar refers to as the 'hegemonic queer outlaw' (Puar, 2007, p. 226). What it challenged, too, were modes of theorising compelled by the legacies of Foucault and Butler, which, according to Bernini, were 'reassuring in their progressivism' (Bernini, 2021, p. 133), and tied to an 'Enlightenment-style trust in the constant progress of humanity towards the better' (Bernini, 2021, p. 133). According to Bernini, central to this ethical framework had been the implicit connection by which the sexual was tethered to progress (Bernini, 2021, p. 133). Those challenging this, however, called into question the very 'possibility of turning sex, as sex, into a political issue' (Bernini, 2021, p. 135).

Alternatively, authors such as Leo Bersani put forward an image of the body as something fundamentally negative. Bersani's 1987 essay 'Is The Rectum a Grave?' returned and in later decades became pivotal to theorists challenging to the way in which sex, in its material, embodied and resistant form, had been largely omitted from queer theorising. Writing as an ongoing response to AIDS, Bersani troubled the kind of political belonging that queer theory had until then maintained, based on Butler and Foucault's 'optimistic' view of the revolutionary potential of queer sexualities (Bernini, 2021, p. 133).). 'Is The Rectum a Grave?' pointed to collective queer pain as an alternative mode of queer belonging, asking sexual minorities 'to accept the pain of embracing, at least provisionally, a homophobic representation of homosexuality' (Bersani, 2010, p. 15). Echoing this, Lee Edelman problematised the figure of futurity within queer emancipatory politics, arguing that queer body must, as part of its meaning, challenge all notions of progress. In these ways, queer thought turned to 'sad passions' (Bernini, 2021, p. 144), including Jack Halberstam's concept of 'queer

failure' (Halberstam, 2011), Lauren Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) and her concept of 'slow death' (Berlant, 2007).

Within these affective turns, however, some, like José Esteban Muñoz, insisted on the affective dimensions of hope, collectivity, and even utopianism. Yet these utopias embraced, rather than expelled, negativity, refusing simplistic binaries between positive and negative affect (Bernini, 2021, p. 144). Finally, although a discussion of this remains outside the scope of this essay, another affective turn within queer theorising also travelled through the work of Gilles Deleuze and new materialism. As Jabir Puar describes, whereas the former reflected structures of being or feeling, the latter imagined affect as a physiological and biological phenomenon, as 'ontological emergence… released from cognition' (Puar, 2007, p. 206).

In these ways, queer theories re-addressed the space of the body within critical theory as something other than as de-facto figure for revolutionary politics - something searching for new discursive parameters. This marked a movement away from the 'representational critiques of poststructuralism' (Puar, 2007, p. 208) and the 'interpellated subject' of Foucault (Puar, 2007, p. 208); a shift away from the emphasis on discourse and mediation within these paradigms. For some, like Edelman, this depended on engaging in a novel theoretical context. His work centred on a firmly Lacanian analytic, which many theorists, such as Jack Halberstam, critiqued for its inflexibility. Yet others, like Lauren Berlant, drew on a radically expansive network of ideas and prioritised a linguistic inventiveness, following a Deleuzian emphasis on creative concept-production as the locus of philosophy. The emerging question of queer critique was therefore also methodological, echoing the question posed by

Frantz Fanon In *Black Skin, White Masks:* how do we bring invention into existence?[26] (Barber, 2017). Without denying the foundational nature of Butler and Foucault, a central problem addressed by those in dialogue with their legacy was the silence to which post-structuralist discourse had consigned the body. This turn to affect sought to challenge this binary by bringing the body to language.

Breaking into the human

In responding to *Gender Trouble* as a foundational text for queer thought, much of this critique addressed Butler specifically. As Butler themselves describe in their introduction to *Bodies That Matter* (1996)*, the book that followed *Gender Trouble* (1990), the question of 'materiality' became pivotal to a critique of the book. The body had always been a central aspect Butler's thought. As Hannah Stark describes in a text exploring the foundational impact of Hegelian philosophy on Butler's work (Stark, 2014), the body was the dimension through which they extended Hegel's philosophy. It was through the body that Butler imagined and expanded the emphasis, in Hegel, on the relational and historical nature of subjectivity. Stark describes how Butler's contribution was that of the subject's profound un-knowability; its opacity or corporeality. In doing so, Butler called on the body as something inextricable from a concept of the self. For Stark, this was Butler's 'supplement' to a Hegelian thought system, one through which they then expanded his ethics, developing a 'post-Hegelian ethical framework' (Stark, 2014, p. 90). Butler's argument, sustained across their work, was that the subject does not finally close or coalesce into a whole (as is the crucial stage in Hegelian dialectics) but remains fundamentally open - 'non-synthetic'

---

[26] This is taken from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), as quoted by Jared Sexton in 'On Black Negativity, Or The Affirmation Of Nothing: Jared Sexton,
interviewed by Daniel Barber' (2017).

(Stark, 2014, p. 92); refusing 'dialectic synthesis' (Stark, 2014, p. 92). In this way, Butler's thinking arose not only from an emphasis on a Hegelian priority of the relational, but also on a notion of 'corporeal vulnerability' (Butler, 2004, p. 23).

And yet, Stark also describes the way in which Hegel remained a problematic foundation to Butler's thought. What scaffolds Butler's wider project, argues Stark, is the Hegelian concept of recognition (Stark, 2014, p. 90). For Hegel, this concept described the formation of consciousness in relation to the gaze of the other. Through the concept, human existence is conceived of as fundamentally relational, formed within a scene of reciprocal, social recognition. Not to be recognised therefore means that one is consigned to non-existence. Alongside Foucault's reconceptualization of power, this concept was pivotal to Butler. As Stark contends, it was in relation to these two concepts that Butler re-articulated J. L. Austin's concept of performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990); speaking to the Hegelian problematic in order to imagine a way of re-inscribing oneself into social visibility and therefore existence. However, the concept also implied a dualism between being and non-being, a fissure that would mark Butler's imaginary of the body as that which remains outside of language, or being.

In the books that followed *Gender Trouble,* Butler took the problem of recognition into social justice more broadly, turning to the problem that this primary relationality names, asking what it means to imagine ourselves as tied to others with such intimacy and force that our existence is unthinkable without theirs. In *Senses of The Subject* (2015) they evoke this in relation micro-relations of abuse (for example, as with a child tied to a primary care giver unable or unwilling to provide safety, but to whom, nevertheless, the child remains bound for survival). They then unfold the problematic more broadly, in relation to a society supporting forms of life that, at the same time, it

renders as unliveable or 'ungrieveable' (Butler, 2009)[27], probing the multitude of unmarked and un-mourned losses of those who had died of AIDS in North America in the 1980s, those consigned to perpetual state violence, and, in speaking alongside Frantz Fanon, those racialised out of existence. As Butler writes of Fanon in *Subjects That Matter,* his work was pivotal in naming the latter; 'the conditions under which racialization establishes a kind of being who is destroyed prior to the very possibility of living (and) who must, in order to live, draw upon and develop another understanding of embodied freedom.' (Butler, 2015, p. 10)

Key to this assertion, for Butler, was that the self becomes less than human not simply in the eyes of the oppressor, but in one's own; that structural violence denies the possibility of existence on a fundamental, ontological level. Butler's theories of subversive performativity imagined agency into this scene, asking how one could reinscribe oneself into recognition; how one might use existing modes of power to challenge the boundaries barring them entry - how one might break into the human (Butler, 2015, p. 10). According to Stark, Butler's central question has been, throughout, how the frames designating the 'recognisably human' (Stark, 2014, p. 94) can be expanded. And yet, as she continues, this also marks a fundamental problem concerning the figure of otherness, alterity or non-being in their work. This is because such an imaginary of resistance, argues Stark, remains 'wholly dependent on a sensemaking relation to already existing (although socially contingent) categories of being'[28] (Stark, 2014, p. 95). Here, Stark does not deny the nuance of this dynamic

---

[27] Butler unfolds these questions of complex human interdependency in the introduction to *Subjects of Desire* (2015), asking "what does it mean to require what breaks you?" (Butler, 2015, p. 9)

[28] Although speaking from a different theoretical position to the one explored here, Slavoj Žižek, in his Lacanian critique of Butler, echoes Stark's critique: 'One should maintain a crucial distinction between a mere 'performative reconfiguration', a subversive displacement which

across Butler's work. It's precisely into this space that Butler's ethics address themselves; into a space in which the subject risks its social existence in order, paradoxically, to survive. And yet, Stark points to an problematic dualism within this system of thought, where the body appears consigned to a place outside of language; outside of being[29]. As Butler themselves attest; 'the body is perhaps the name for our conceptual humility. The limit of our conceptual schemes. The site of our linguistic failing' (Berkeley Arts + Design, 2015, 8:56). This critique, concerning the interminable presence of a dualism between being and non-being in critical thought, had already been levelled towards Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1964) when Jacques Derrida described the text as a problematic attempt to 'write a history of silence' (Derrida, 1978). Even if the presence of this binary, in the work of Foucault, was evidently aligned with the power of the negative (as it has been for Butler), Derrida's claimed that it still underscored and re-iterated an essential division, one that prioritised language, or being.

It was in this sense, then, that much of the critique that followed *Gender Trouble*, and shaped queer theories to come, charged Butler's work with missing or mis-articulating materiality - a question Butler returned to in many forms, initially in *Bodies That Matter* and later in the books through which they addressed and spoke alongside the body more directly, such as *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), in which Butler examined the embodied nature of activism. This

---

remains *within* the hegemonic field and, as it were, conducts an internal guerrilla war... *and* the much more radical *act* of a thorough reconfiguration of the entire field which redefines the very conditions of socially sustained performativity' (Žižek, 2009, p. 314).

[29] Brian Massumi, writing in *Parables For the Virtual* (2002), describes how within the broader histories of philosophy the only viable body for critical thought had been a discursive body; that any discussion of sensation had been 'redundant' or even 'destructive' (Massumi, 2002, p. 2).

critique remains vital, however, as queer theories continue to search for new forms of address, turning to novel forms of expression with which to apprehend sense and sensation, 'emotions and tactile knowings' (Puar, 2007, p. 206).

One pivotal example of this critique of Butler was Eve Sedgewick's *Touching Feeling* (2002). As she wrote in the introduction to the book, in a sentiment that became key to problematising and building on Butler's legacy: [30]

> I have... taken a distinct step to the side of the deconstructive project of
> analysing apparently non-linguistic phenomena in rigorously linguistic
> terms... Like much deconstructive work, *Touching Feeling* wants to
> address aspects of experience and reality that do not present
> themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside others
> that do, rather than submit to the apparent common sense that
> requires a strict separation between the two and usually implies an
> ontological privileging of the former. What may be different in the
> present work, however, is a disinclination to reverse those priorities
> by subsuming nonverbal aspects of reality firmly under the aegis of the
> linguistic (Sedgewick, 2002, p. 6).

Further, she writes:

---

[30] Sedgewick's critique of Butler centred on Butler's use and development of J. L. Austin theory of performative utterance. Sedgewick challenged the way in which Butler used language to speak about social reality as though social reality was inherently linguistic. As she argues in the introduction to *Touching Feeling*, Butler's *Gender Trouble* hypostatizes Austin's theory of speech acts, relocating his theories from a question of how certain utterances affected life, to life *as utterance* (Sedgewick, 2002, pp. 3-9). This, in turn, prompts Sedgewick to call out what she claims to be the paradoxically essentializing gesture of Butler's anti-essentialist thought (Sedgewick, 2002, p. 6).

Many kinds of objects and events mean, in many heterogeneous ways

and contexts, and I see some value in not reifying or mystifying the

linguistic kinds of meaning unnecessarily' (Sedgewick, 2002, p. 6).

Sedgewick's book then responds by offering a way of reimagining language in relation

to the queer body. The book folds affective states such as shame and paranoia into

academic discourse; challenging and disbanding an ongoing dualism; using the body,

including her own experience of cancer, to produce and provoke meaning, and

engaging with the body as something illuminating rather than negating, no longer 'the

limit of our conceptual schemes' (Berkeley Arts + Design, 2015, 8:56) - towards a

different imaginary of its agency.

Auto-

Over the last number of decades, this turn to affect has also been mirrored by the

(re)turn, within queer theorising, to the auto- and the confessional (as political tools

integral to earlier feminist, gay and lesbian movements). As Lauren Fournier writes,

the entire history of feminist theory and practice could be described as *auto-theory,*

from the performances of artists such as Ana Mendieta (1976), to Black feminist

scholars such as Audre Lorde, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga (laurenfournier.net,

2018). And yet, the re-articulation of the confessional voice into a critical genre also

coincides with the internal challenges to queer theorising evoked in this essay. In its

most prominent texts, Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2008) and Maggie Nelson's *The*

Argonauts (2015), this took the form of a self-reflexive writing moving between a

confessional first person voice and a broader theoretical examination of gender,

sexuality, reproduction, transition and grief - entangling these affects with reflections

on their broader political and biopolitical frames. But these texts also appear to speak back to Butler in a different way. Each explores transgender experience (through Preciado's navigation of transition and testosterone and Nelson's trans partner Harry Dodge). In doing so they bring the lived, material dimension of trans* experience into discursive form. They function, then, as a challenge to the notion that gender has no basis in the body, that it can simply be chosen or performed at will. While this remains a deeply misguided reading of Butler, these texts nevertheless appear to engage with this misreading as something mistakenly taken to represent the views of trans* movements themselves.

Elsewhere, however, this presence of the autobiographical within the theoretical remains more discrete, although no less significant. Jasbir Puar describes how her book *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) was written in response to the dual events of North America's invasion of Iraq and the sudden death of her brother three weeks earlier. This information does not feature prominently in the text, but is found at the back of the book in the acknowledgements. As she describes, the relationship between the two events founded her project, which became a 'work of mourning' (Puar, 2007, p. 243) intended to examine the junction of personal and collective grief (or rather, the absence of the former in relation to those bodies branded as terrorist, post 9/11, and sanctioned to be killed). As she describes, the work was led by the desire to 'de-privatize' and 'de-exceptionalize' this grief, connecting it to 'other, collective losses' (Puar, 2021). Although not a significant aspect of the text itself, this information became a central aspect of any subsequent interviews Puar gave about the work; a form of disclosure that framed her theoretical, political project more broadly. Rather than a centering of the 'I' that can be seen as problematic in the work

of Preciado or Nelson[31], this was a more subtle imbrication of the personal within the theoretical, where the complexity of self-referentiality, within a mode of theory struggling against neo-liberal individualism, could be felt. As she writes:

> My younger brother, Sandeep, died suddenly on February 20, 2003 while in India with his partner and his son, who had just celebrated his first birthday. Three weeks later, to the day, the United States invaded Iraq... It is in between these two scenes of death that this book emanates. Simultaneously confronted with the devastation of a personal death so proximate and intimate and the political deaths of those at a distance, I began writing (Puar, 2007, p. 243).

In this way, through the incursion of the personal and affective into a form of writing that remains deeply theoretical - collective - Puar maintains the distinction between the two, without sacrificing the power of her disclosure. This emphasis, on their disjunction, mirrors the way in which Butler has responded to the critique of their own work. In *Subjects of Desire* (2015), they write:

> I think that it must be possible to claim that the body is not known or identifiable apart from the linguistic coordinates that establish the boundaries of the body - *without* thereby claiming that the body is nothing other than the language by which it is known. This last claim seeks to make the body an ontological effect of the language that governs its knowability. Yet this view

---

[31] Jackie Stacey, in speaking about feminist autobiography today, quotes Carolyn Laubender in her critique of auto-theory. She quotes Laubender in saying: 'Autotheory enacts a wish for the ethico-political form of self writing no bound up with the reproduction of neoliberal individualism's violences' (CPC Centre for Postdigital Cultures, 2022, 18:29). Stacey argues that Laubender is sceptical about the 'reparative moods' of this form of writing (CPC Centre for Postdigital Cultures, 2022, 18:29).

fails to note the incommensurability between the two domains, an

incommensurability that is not precisely an opposition (Butler, 2015, p. 20).

In this way, Puar's work appears closer to queer affective turns than the writing of

Nelson or Preciado, in its de-privileging of the 'I', in the same breath as affect - the

work of grief - envelops her project. Here, too, the sense of paradox central to a queer

theory remains active, speaking back to Jordy Rosenberg's concerns that the problem

of mediation is not disavowed as the queer body searches for avenues of meaning in

conjunction with new sensitivities to the lived, sensed and felt.

Impossible bodies

In 2015, as I was starting this project, I came across two artworks: Chantal Akerman's joint projects *No Home Movie* (2015) and *My Mother Laughs* (2013) and Steve McQueen's video installation Ashes (2002-2015). Both accompanied me through the project as examples of practice that still sought to use the space of visual art to expand on LGBTQIA+ visibility. In both, sexuality inflects the different forms of grief explored. In these works, queer experience felt, to me, as integral to (and indivisible from) the wider narrative of each work. In Akerman's project, a recounting of an abusive relationship some years prior returns in her documentation of her mother's last months. In McQueen's, an encounter with a young man murdered in the Caribbean town in which McQueen's parents were born opens a conversation between desire, race and death hinged on the tenderness and ambiguity of McQueen's gaze; a queerness invited into but not explicitly identified by the work. In these artworks sexuality felt, to me, political precisely because it is not named in reductive terms. They express an antagonism towards identity; a disinvestment or dis-identification, but grapple with it at the level of experience. Two texts by queer women bookend Akerman's text, yet the queer politics of this work feel spoken by its form, or the relationship between content and form; a complex navigation of the documentary across writing and film, a queer ethos materialised by the demonstration of a precarious hold on one's own being.

I imagined these works in contrast to artworks in which the word *queer* now appeared as an open signifier, no longer seeking clear representation for LGBTQIA+ experience or identity in social terms. I saw this most often in the form of choreographic performance; in artworks such as Alex B. Jenkins *The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together[32]* (2017) or Florence Peake and Eve

---

[32] This was an artworks that took place over a number of weeks in the main space of Chisenhale Gallery. These were a series of durational (day, or evening, long performances)

Stainton's *Slug Horizons* (2018). These artworks, as forms of dance entering the space

of the gallery, appeared to combine a post-representational politics with a post-

representational aesthetics; using the body as an axis through which to explore

conceptual forms of connectivity and solidarity with other life forms (as in *Slug*

Horizons) or pre-subjective states of being (as in *The tremble, the symptom, the swell*

and the hole together). These artworks seem no longer to dialogue with contemporary

art as a space for representational politics, no longer metabolizing the life of the social

or the human. Instead, they appear to look for meaning in the immediate and

contingent conditions of the body; its repetitions, sequences, and rhythms. I saw Eve

Stainton, who performed in *Slug Horizons,* repeating the same gesture across a

number of her other performances; a rising, repetitive vibration moving across her

body, something that resembled a seizure, which she performed in different variations

while lying or sitting on the floor. While these performances were otherwise free of

language, this seemed like a form of signification; a pre-subjective, embodied semiosis,

striating her movement into equal parts to create a form of measure.

This type of practice felt, for me, important in its retreat from representation. It

expressed something essential about the capacity of contemporary art to speak for

marginalised bodies, or identity more broadly - it no longer appeared to be doing so.

Rather, it reflected Alain Badiou's description of dance as an art form more broadly:

---

exploring the body in relationship to affects of distraction, desire and loss. A large group of
performers, in everyday clothing, explored minimal choreographic gestures and movements in
response to sound and spoken word, sometimes inhabiting a provisional wooden 'set' covering
the central space of the room. Central to this work was its temporal structure of two
interwoven types of performance, differing in subject and length. One of these, the 'Episodes',
took place fortnightly, while the 'Fugue' performances were on every Friday to Sunday. The
gallery describes this work as '[tracing] queer affinities across social practices, art forms and
timeframes' (e-flux, 2017).

'like a circle in space.. a circle that is its own principle, a circle that is not drawn from the outside, but rather draws itself.' (A. Badiou, 2005, p. 58). In contrast, what felt important about Akerman and McQueen's works was in the way in which both continued the dialectical gesture of drawing experience into the realm of representation. These artworks made no pretence to have overcome either the necessity of a material support for the artwork (which the choreographic performances nevertheless utilised in their dependence on the gallery space), or the social, human remainder of queer politics. Instead, they appeared to continue to carry the form of the human, the social and the object as necessary burdens.

Illimitable expansion

Writing alongside a history of avant-garde performance practices, Josephine Berry's book *Art and (Bare) Life* (2018) describes how art in the 20th century sought to transform life, but in the 'illimitable' (Berry, 2018, p. 4) expansion of its institutions, instead folded life, increasingly, under the *aegis* of art. Further, she describes how contemporary art then became a key terrain for the expansion of neoliberal power. Berry contends that for an artist such as Valie Export, working in the 1970s, art allowed a form of 'restitution' (Berry, 2018, p. 267); a way of reclaiming her identity as a woman through experimental forms of self-reflexivity, converting herself from the object 'woman' into a 'subject of her own history' (Berry, 2018, p. 262). However, as she describes, by the mid 80s artists such as Andrea Fraser could no longer use art as a site within which to perform or imagine such a restitution. Likewise, Berry evokes art collective *COUM Transmissions*[33], who, through the 1970s, weaponised the body in

---

[33] *COUM Transmissions,* a performance art collective, were founded in Hull by Genesis P-Orridge. They were known for their highly sexualised performances and, in particular, for their

highly sexualised performances. They brought aspects of sexual life into the sphere of artistic visibility in a way that pushed at the horizon of what a public body could do, what people could watch bodies do and what they could feel while watching these bodies. However, the horizon that these art practices expanded against later returned as the horizon of 'neoliberal human capital' (Berry, 2018, p. 26). In doing so, the book traces the process by which something that felt possible for the neo-avant-garde practices of the 60s and 70s; a dialectical relation to life - a bringing in of what was formerly outside in order to use art for representational, and therefore political, ends (even if this representation concerns the reclaiming of the most molecular forms of experience) - is, decades later, difficult to imagine.

Berry then describes Fraser's performances[34] as a potent example of the types of feminist practice that followed, within which the primary concern was no longer a self-restitution, but 'institutional critique as self-critique' (Berry, 2018, p. 275). The distinction, so important to neo-avant-garde performance, between art and life (a distinction that allowed a conceptualisation of its collapse or overcoming) moved, for Fraser, into the interiorised conditions of the institution, within which freedom could only be gleaned on specific and contingent terms. As Kerstin Stakemeier describes, this reflected a general movement of art from a position of *autonomy from*, to *autonomy within* (Stakemeier, 2016). This movement defines much contemporary art today and speaks back to choreographic performance as a practice of a certain kind of

---

participation in the ICA show *Prostitution* (1976) after which they disbanded. Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti then went on to form industrial band *Throbbing Gristle.*

[34] Andrea Fraser's performance practice often involved imitating figures from within the art institution, such as a tour guide, as in the work *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989). Here she mixed conventional aspects of a gallery tour with strange interludes of passionate speeches about broader political ideas.

autonomy that remains enclosed. What this entails, therefore, is a certain rejection of art in the form of its political legacies - its struggle with the forces of the inside/outside and attempts to go beyond this fissure. Berry ends the book in calling for a return to precisely this, although no longer necessarily conceived of from within the remit of art. She writes:

> Standing as we are at the brink of art's total integration and hence total meaninglessness, it's hard to see any way ahead that doesn't look to renew the avant-garde demand to realize art as a praxis of life and thereby abolish it's separateness. Yet if we are to renew this cry, it can only be on condition that the life referred to be understood in its broadest, most sociogenic and biogenic senses; where folding and errancy, intention and mutation, are able to range widely, without systematically precluding and always renewing one another... (as) the never-ending expansion of life-forms, forms of life and claims for life, without fixed horizon or identity (Berry, 2018, pp. 321-322).

In the chapters that follow I trace the movement of my own practice towards these questions; a movement compelled both by the queer subject of my practice but responding, also, to the ever changing social and political meaning of art.

Typologies

A typology of encounters:

Following -

Interacting with -

Being replaced or displaced by -

(the male body)

A typology of distances, focal depths:

Following

I   -   I

Interacting with

I - I

Being replaced/displaced by

I - I

A typology of sites:

Private/personal

Interpersonal

Public

A typology of forms:

Following: document

Interacting with: exhibition space

Being replaced or displaced by: writing

A typology of openings:

Me - him:

between two bodies

Performance - Document:

between action and event

Document - Document - Document:

between unfolding iterations/echoes of the event

A typology of becomings:

Zweikommasieben magazine I/Zweikommasieben magazine II: Joe

Fall Performance/Untitled (M.M. Page): Matt

Ultan Coil: Ultan

A typology of actions:

Repeating

Enclosing

Scoring

Writing

A typology of dynamics:

Zweikommasieben magazine I - Experience/representation

Fall - Audience/performer

Zweikommasieben magazine II - Public/Private

Ultan Coil - Event/document

Searching for:

Joe

Matt

Ultan

Self

Becoming:

Image

Site

Score

Text

Bevin Court

Figure 2: Gafarova, M. *Bevin Court* (2016). C-type photographic print, 29 x 23.5 cm.

In the first few weeks of this project I travelled to Bevin Court, a mid-century modern block of flats in Finsbury, London, to photograph its interior. I chose this building because of its long connection to Soviet history, seeking to find a way of engaging with a physical manifestation of a part of my cultural identity (as someone born, and raised in early childhood, in Moscow). The striking, constructivist building represented an idealised version of the kind of architecture I knew as a child. I compared it to its standardised Russian counterparts; the *khrushchyovkas* quickly thrown up during the 60s as low cost mass public housing. In contrast, Bevin Court spoke to a vision of this architecture never offered to the masses, like the inventions of Tatlin.

I travelled to Bevin Court in the morning and waited for someone to let me slip into the building. With me, I brought a medium format camera, a tripod and a small bag. Inside was beautiful and deserted, in the late stages of a restoration. The underside of the staircase had just been painted. It rose into the hollow of the stairwell in a jumble of red, angular blocks. On the ground floor, a courtyard framed by a glass partition contained a small palm. I spent the day in the stairwell while the residents came and went, some of whom I spoke to briefly. I explored the different layers of materials transforming and aging on the site; the joints connecting older and newer bits of wooden railing, the similar joints in the concrete floor. In the corridor, a large, covered mural by Peter Yates was also under restoration, visible through a small gap in a plastic cover.

The prints I made from his trip, and some taken in the street on my way home, were the first images I showed as part of this project: the basement of the building and a view of the staircase from above. The first of these, the basement, I printed in a slightly varying hew of blue and green. The second, a view of the staircase from above, I showed on its own. Through this journey I found myself stepping into an aspect of

my identity in real, embodied terms, and even though the subject explored by this

project soon changed, this act remained.
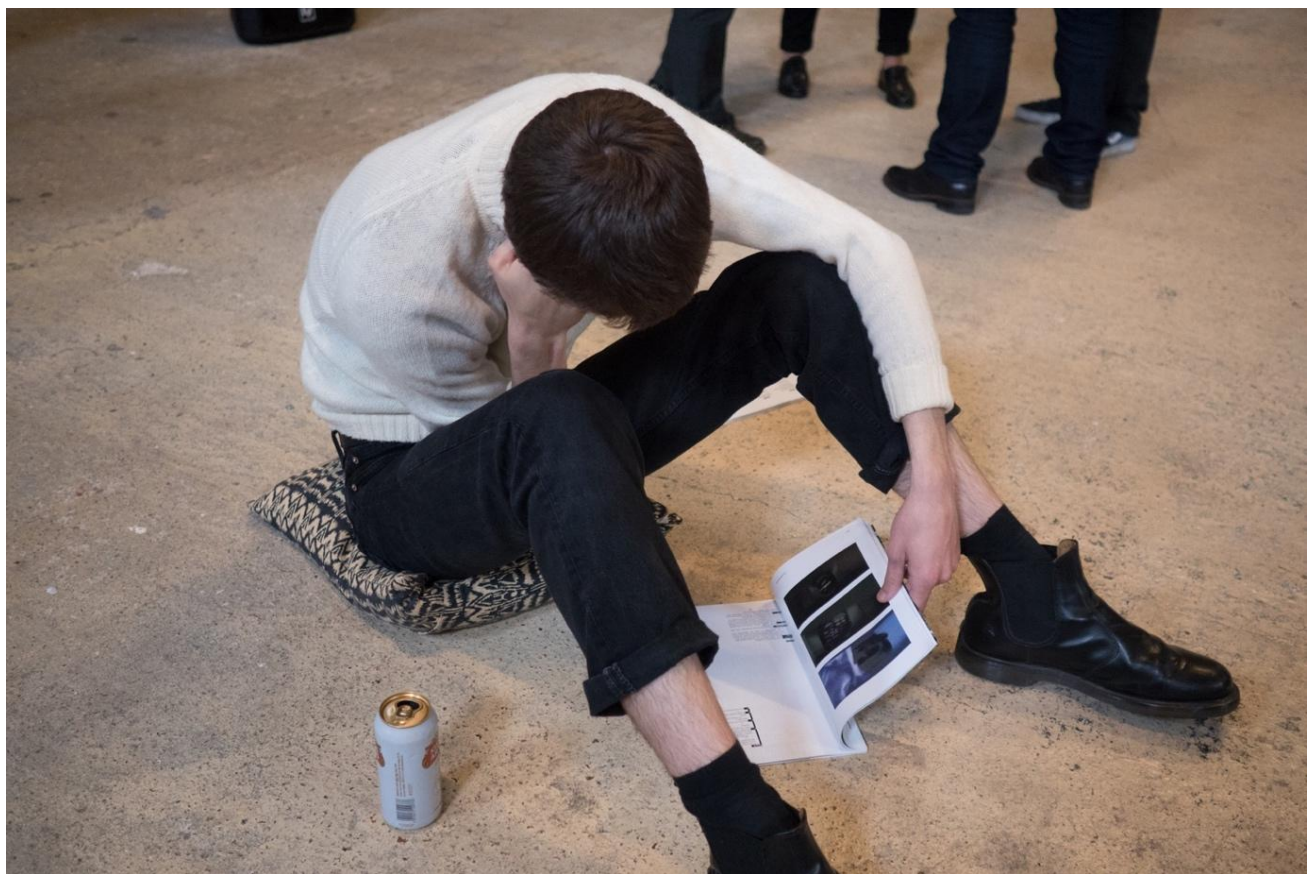
Zweikommasieben magazine I

Figure 6: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine I* (2016). Performance. (Photographic document).

(© Monika Kita)

I met Joe around six months into the project. I saw him on the other side of the road and crossed in order to walk behind him. He was beautiful, like someone from a Peter Hujar photograph, tall with black hair. He leaned forward slightly as he walked. His clothes were mostly black. The outline of the back of his body reminded me of the men I had worked with before. I didn't have a camera but followed him on reflex.

I walked behind him for a few steps before he turned left into a doorway. I walked past, then turned around and followed him into a small, crowded record shop. I followed him downstairs and watched him slip into a storeroom then appear behind the till. I waited in the queue. I had made some plans to take part in an upcoming research show at the RCA and quickly decided to ask him to participate, even though I didn't know what form this would take. I was nervous but after a brief chat he agreed. I walked away with his number on a piece of folded paper.

We met again a few weeks later in a cafe across the road, where I had planned to tell him a little more about the project. I was exploring other media and, during these months, I had made three disparate artworks: one using an unfinished screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini (Brunatto, 1974), one in which I staged a re-enactment of a scene from the film *Winter Sleep* by Nuri Bilge Ceylan (2014), and a work in which I created a short monologue from interviews in a magazine as a response to the recent nightclub shootings in the U.S., which had targeted LGBTQIA+ people from Latino communities. In this artwork I used the voices of anonymous others, taken from a magazine about contemporary club culture, as a way of searching for a way to respond. The work reflected on my sense of voicelessness in the face of the attack, but also the impossibility, within contemporary culture more broadly, to respond in any other way than speak through already existing forms - something reflected in the vast operations of *detournement* within contemporary art. What felt particularly important

to my encounter with Joe, however, was the resonance between the magazine I had been working with and the shop I found him in; the fact that both touched on music.

I told Joe a little bit about this work and the fact that I wanted to try to explore the same gesture (although not the content). I explained how I wanted to take on the body, rather the voice, of another. I didn't tell him about my prior work, but nor did I imagine this to be directly related to that practice. Rather, I explained that I was seeking to shift registers in terms of the forms of appropriation my practice had been exploring. His body, his masculinity, the fact that the act of having followed him was identical to the many encounters I had had in the context of my photo practice - all these were, strangely, almost entirely absent from my perception of our encounter. I told him that all I would be asking him to do would be to occupy an exhibition space for the duration of an evening of performances.

Something about being disconnected from the camera and simply going through the motions of what I had previously done, in searching for my subjects, then interacting with them, reminded me of how important the other side of that practice had been; not the photographs themselves, but the walks on which I found these men. The time I spent outside, walking and searching, briefly following, sometimes interacting - mostly seeking permission in taking their photograph, but not always. I had felt, but never articulated, the power dynamics involved in this process: my use of these men and the fact that I was controlling the representational space they would inhabit. My images seemed to take their bodies from them.

I remembered, also, how in my earlier practice a lack of clarity on my side had sometimes been a way of taking power; responding to my own idealisation of the male body - a sense of idealisation that seemed to stabilise gendered polarity instead of

challenging it. Remembering this pulled another dynamic of gender into view: that of the male/female dyad that Joe and I visibly embodied.

The performance took place around a month later in a large, derelict nineteenth century chapel now used for cultural events. The show was part of a much larger research exhibition taking place over a number of disconnected buildings in the same area of South London. The plan was for the performances to open the event, while the show itself then continued into the week.

Over the weeks leading up to the show I sometimes imagined the upcoming performance as one in which my encounter with Joe was simply prolonged - in which that which had been central to my former practice, the relational space between me and my subjects, was now something contained by the event of the show. I imagined this as something I might then be able to centre within the project in a way I had never done before in my prior practice. At the same time, I also explored what this gesture could be without reference to my identity: a delegated performance with Joe's body marking the duration of the show, or a dance with little or minimal movement. In the latter versions, I imagined Joe's body, and his masculinity, as something smuggled into the space of the exhibition (and the space of my project) because of what still felt like my struggle to articulate or justify its presence.

In planning the show, the magazine (from which I had previously constructed the text-based work) returned. I imagined it as something holding Joe in place, pulling his gaze down to the floor. I considered its function to be similar to that of the camera, mediating our encounter, both enabling and denying contact. At the same time, I positioned this as a formal element of the performance. I thought about this work in relation to the kind of choreographic performances I had seen within which the queer

body was thematised. And, so, I thought of Joe's body as an element of a composition, reduced to a form of notation, along with the magazine. I imagined it, also, as an echo of my prior experiments with compositions of photographs, imagining Joe as another element in such a composition, one now being lived.

When Joe arrived, I asked him to spend the duration of the evening reading a copy of the magazine on a small cushion near the middle of the room. I lay two more identical copies of the magazine not far from him. I told him he was free to get up and walk around as much as he needed but asked him to try to continue reading if he did so. I didn't want to be too directive, as none of these gestures were important in themselves, but I did want the text to absorb him, and in doing so, for him to be held by the space - differentiated from the audience. When he sat down I brought him a beer from one of the iced buckets outside. I then joined the audience slowly gathering around the edges of the room.

Joe sat in almost the same position for the duration of the show, standing up for a walk on a few occasions. He sat with the magazine between his legs, sometimes holding it and sometimes placing it down on the floor. His lower arms rested on his knees. From a distance he was difficult to see but came into view when people walked into the centre of the room. They sometimes bent down to talk to him or to take a closer look. The magazines around him seemed, to me, to act as coordinates, claiming the room as belonging to him, or to this performance, but also introducing a sense of sequence or rhythm, one to which his body was tied. I spent the duration of the show walking in and out of the room. I imagined my friends, who knew that he was something to do with me, thinking of us as something combined. They knew that he was there because of me, and because of this, as someone later told me, they imagined him as my avatar.

I imagined Joe, in the space, as one of my earlier photographic references. I imagined him as one of the two men in Tillmans' famous kissing photograph; *The Cock (kiss)* (2002); *man pissing on chair* (1997); *Deer Hirsch* (1995); or as *Anders pulling splinter from his foot* (2004); Joe Dalessandro on the cover of *The Smiths* by The Smiths; *Butt* magazine; Thomas Eakins (1883). But in imagining myself as part of the performance, in thinking of both of us as part of the room, nominated and contained, another genealogy came into view. I thought of the films *Beau Travail* (1999) by Claire Denis and *Close Up* (1991) by Abbas Kiarostami, Steve McQueen's *Ashes* and *Jens. F* by Collier Schorr (2005). These works held a much more ambiguous gaze in relation to the male body. They watched it, but in a way that appeared less erotic, or less sure than the former. I remembered Galoup's confession in *Beau Travail* and Sabzian's trial in *Close Up*, in which a man is tried for impersonating the Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf. These scenes pointed to the intersubjective space I was trying but struggling to name; the desire to inhabit the body of another, but also, the sense that this yearning to be another can sometimes hurt this other.

After the show, me, Joe and B. walked to the station. It was late but still light. We talked all the way and Joe talked a little bit about himself. He was just beginning an MA in English Literature. He lived in London with his mum. He was writing about hauntology. He found the magazine he had been reading genuinely interesting and managed to read through most of it during the show. He seemed entirely trusting of the experience, as though what it had been for him, it had also been for me. As we walked, our conversation felt contained by the lasso thrown by the show, as though an extension to the performance. Its operations seemed infinitely capable of expanding into everything that fell around its edges. Walking beside Joe, I imagined a constellation of points that made our brief interactions so far into something whole - the composite of images, colours, textures and shapes within my former photo

practice, often suspended across a vitrine, now a composite of sensations, presences, absences, words and bodies. Yet I wasn't sure if I wanted to return to these formal experiments as much as I wanted to stay with this experience: the experience of watching myself search for a language with which to know my body, and do so in relation to those of others, from which my own feels inextricable.

Zweikommasieben magazine II

Figure 7: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2017)*.* Performance. (Photographic document).

Figure 8: Gafarova, M. *Zweikommasieben magazine II* (2017)*. Performance. (Photographic document).

Over the next few months I stayed in touch with Joe, exchanging a few emails about our courses. He was interested in learning more about my work and I sent him the short introduction I was working on. In return, he sent me some of his writing.

When a friend contacted me about an upcoming show in a small underground arts space she ran in a crypt under a Church, I immediately asked Joe to come back and take part in another work. This was, more so than anything, because I had not documented *Zweikommasieben magazine* (although I was later given some images by someone who documented the whole show). And even though, at the time, I had not intended to take any pictures, the single image I received of Joe reminded me of how little of the performance felt like it was still with me. I was struggling to put the performance into words, to make sense of it conceptually, but it also felt lost representationally. (Later, this loss came to be central to the project in the form of a resistance to representation, but it wasn't so at the time).

Joe agreed and in imagining the upcoming performance I thought back to the one prior - the tentative, almost imperceptible choreography it entailed via the repetition of the magazines, to which I imagined Joe's body to belong. I thought of this as a 'minor' or minimal choreography. This reduction felt important as something that spoke to the reduction of the choreographic gesture through the history of contemporary dance more broadly - the way Pina Bausch, for example, took simple lived gestures as the object of her compositions, and how these gestures sometimes slipped off the dancers and slid from view, as though, once again, no longer elements of a syntax. To imagine this at its furthest point of reduction would be to imagine a body not moving at all, but to imagine it at a step before this final point - somewhere before the total closure of visibility or semiotics - felt like much of the conversation being had by contemporary dance both on stage and in the gallery space. This, for me,

mirrored the conversations of contemporary art more broadly - the 'expansion of the non-art element within art' (Osborne, 2018, p. 66) - art's capacity to absorb life and, likewise, the artistic gesture of moving towards the extremities of the visible in order to forge novel forms of meaning-making.

A week or so before the show, Joe mentioned that a friend was coming to stay with him and asked if he could come along. I asked, in turn, if his friend wouldn't mind also taking part.

In planning the show, I imagined Joe and his friend engaging in some kind of minimal choreography, their bodies moving or moved by something, in way that might be entirely naturalistic yet structured. I imagined their bodies scoring the exhibition space, marking it into equal parts, making it available to some kind of under-perceived semiotic operation, something potentially outside of the purview of the human. I thought of this in relation to the work of artists like Agnes Martin (1960) - a horizontalized image-space, the movements of Joe and his friend as though Martin's lines.

On the morning of the show I went to the space to look around. I wondered whether the space itself could compel some kind of movement. I wanted to try to pull back on my own agency in terms of what this choreography might be. I found two small alcoves on opposite sides of the room in which the exhibition was taking place and decided to ask Joe and his friend to spend the night sitting inside them, on either side, talking. I imagined their conversation being shaped by the movements of the visitors walking between them. Like Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* (1987), I imagined this work as one in which a constructed situation then compelled the body into something unforeseen.

On the way to the show, just before it began, I came across a music shop and entered. It reminded me of the earlier resonance between magazine and record shop - a small point of connection that nevertheless felt important as an axis for these works. In the shop I found two broken mandolins on sale and bought them. I took them to the show and I gave them to the Joe and his friend (both of whom I knew could play the guitar) as props.

They spent the show sitting opposite one another in the alcoves, talking, their bodies swaying in response to the motion of the crowds. Their sporadic conversation didn't feel forced, however - strumming on the mandolins absorbed them and allowed them to rest in the movement of an activity. I spent a small part of the show taking pictures.

Connected to the choreographic aspect of this performance, however, was something else; my sense of the preceding three works as a sequence, or a score - another way of bringing something into being, giving a temporal structure to artworks that otherwise felt unmoored and searching for something to hold on to. A score, tracking the continuity and variation of these works:

Magazine

Magazine, Joe

Mandolin, Joe, Friend

Fall

Figure 9: Gafarova, M. *Fall (Sketch)* (2017). Ballpoint pen on paper. 21 x 29.7 cm.

A few months after *Zweikommasieben magazine III* I decided to take part in a performance art workshop at the RCA. For four days, a group of us - twenty or so students - explored performance art and its histories, via artists' videos, conversations and practical experiments. During this time we also planned an evening of performances due to take place at the end of the week in a large hall on the ground floor of the college. We were invited to each perform something lasting no longer than three minutes. The performances would take place in no particular order. The plan for the evening was that the performers and audience members would not be differentiated (all would be sitting or standing together while watching the performances unfold).

This was the first formal performance event in which I was participating and it was the first time I had ever planned to use my own body in my practice. I came to the workshop with the intention to simply throw myself more fully into performance art as the space into which I had invited Joe's body in the previous works. I wanted to understand more about the dimensions and dynamics of performance art, to know it as I felt I knew the photographic image.

On the day before the main event we were given a trial run - some hours where we could explore the kinds of actions and gestures we would bring to the following night. I decided, during this trial, to explore the interpersonal dynamics of the space; to do something involving the other participants and the intersubjective space between us. I wanted to return to that which had felt so important to my photographic practice. But this also felt like a challenge to the dynamics of the space itself, a space that felt demarcated (institutionally, architecturally) and therefore, in some sense, also free of both risk and failure. What felt important, in anything I was to do, was some kind of challenge to this space.

The only way to do this, I imagined, would be to pressure the audience/performer dynamic. This was the only aspect of this space, in relation to its many 'closures', I felt I could affect. This seemed, in the moment, like the only way to approach a sense of risk or tension in a space that otherwise felt capable of accepting and enclosing anything - and therefore, where the dialectical, or representational, tension of art felt meaningless.

In one of the performances that followed, a student appeared and enacted what seemed to be a portrayal of a person with a physical disability, while simultaneously gesturing toward his exposed genitals, which he had partially removed from his jeans. At the time, I didn't read this performance as carrying the same intentions but later came to understand that it was likely attempting something similar. Behind the apparent ease and virtuosity of the performance, there was likely a deep sense of underlying risk.

I decided, during the trial, to do so by interacting with the other students in some minimal way. I spent the three minutes I had walking around the large room in which the workshop was taking place, approaching each of the participants, who were sitting or standing round its periphery with their backs to the wall, then taking something that was removable from their clothing - lint or hair – before placing this back down on the floor beside them. I made eye contact but remained silent. My decisions as to what to remove were largely spontaneous, seeking to probe the space between us.

For the final show, I imagined doing something similar but re-engaging with masculinity, as I had done in *Zweikommasieben I & II.* I wanted to return to gender as

the subject of my practice. I therefore planned to try a similar gesture but do so solely in relation to the bodies of people I perceived to be men (cisgendered or otherwise).

On the following morning, the day of the performance, I decided to buy a small selection of coats and use these to dress a number of the male participants during the main event. In doing so I imagined extending the intersubjective space between me and the subjects in my photo practice to the space of performance, but mediating this encounter via an object of clothing (or rather, through the act of dressing), instead of the camera.

I imagined joining the challenge to the dynamic of audience/performer (as explored in the trial run) to another; a challenge to the interpersonal space between me and the these male subjects. In this way, I hoped to explore what this interpersonal space meant to me, but this time, from within a scene of representation in which some risk could be felt - in which the scene of encounter I was trying to isolate (with the sphere of performance) was also, at the same time, being lived. In this way, I wanted to the work to contain a simultaneity of form and content, each of which would pressure a binary. The way in which my actions, in relation to my subjects, pressured the binary of male/female was not something I had conceptualised, but I knew that, as before, this had something to do with inhabiting the body of another (possibly, simply through proximity).

This approach allowed me to create and work within a representational space where the parameters of visibility were momentarily troubled, and would therefore need to be re-established within the immanent conditions of the work itself.

Instead of coats, however, on the evening of the event I ended up with a small pile of jumpers, which I brought to the show and placed in a corner of the room as the event began. I imagined the act of dressing another with a jumper, rather than a coat, would be more difficult - not as subtle as hoped - but still possible.

As the event then began to unfold, both audience members and performers walked into the room and sat down in small groups. I watched the performances start to gain pace, moving from one artist to the next in no fixed order. At a certain point during the show, a male student came out of the adjoining room holding a small table. He placed this adjacent to a wall made entirely of glass, which looked onto the street, and stepped on. He then began using a small handsaw to saw through one of its legs. Minutes later, the leg began to crack. As it did, he fell to the floor along with the table, and as he fell I decided to intervene. My decision was spontaneous. I had no prior intention of making my intervention as public as this, but something about his action felt like an opening.

I approached fast, my arms holding the jumper in front of me. I leaned towards him just as he was lifting himself up off the floor. But before we made contact I felt his elbow crash into my leg, his body swinging round in order to grab my arms. My reaction was to grab his waist, while, on seeing me, he turned to run. He then took four or five long, hard strides towards the exit as I held on and slid across the floor in tow. When we reached the doorway we both fell.

In reflecting on why I had intervened at that particular moment, I later understood that something about this reversal of roles felt crucial to what I was hoping to do. Rather than interacting with the audience, as an artist, I found myself intervening in a performance as a member of the audience, and it was this shift that felt like the

difference - the challenge - to this dynamic. The space of the workshop had made this challenge possible by blurring the boundary between artist/audience, by loosening the rules about how and when we were performing. And so, it was the space, rather than my actions, that facilitated this. In another context this would have been impossible.

After the show had finished I approached the student in small adjoining room as he was packing his things. I apologised. I explained the reasoning behind my actions and he spoke about his response. He hadn't seen me, as I believed he had. Because I approached him from the side my intervention had taken him completely by surprise. His name was Matt. He was a student on the MA. I had seen him around the college but only briefly. This strange event felt both intimate and bounded by the space in which it unfolded.

In some ways, this performance had felt like a parody of my former practice. Instead of exploring and attempting to occupy or inhabit the male form within the remit of the image, I was doing so in real, embodied terms; holding his body violently to mine as though in an attempt to affect a transmutation.

Someone was documenting the show and a few weeks later I received two images: one blurry, difficult to read, my body falling and him almost invisible, one of his legs and a bit of his torso behind me, and a second, from the side, both of us in the same shot, watching someone else perform. I didn't use either image and later lost them.

Untitled (M. M. Page)

Figure 10: Gafarova, M. *Untitled (M. M. Page)* (2018). (Stills from video documentation).

The strange temporality of being on a research degree in relation to the MA students meant that their rhythms were deeply familiar, while they themselves usually weren't. I didn't see or speak to Matt for over a year until I saw him performing in another small show at the RCA. This time I was firmly a member of the audience. The room was a small newly-built classroom on the upper levels of the building. A desk had been moved to the side for the show of second year students. I realised when I saw him again, here, that he must have just been starting his degree when we met.

I watched Matt emerge from another room in a similar suit to the one before; simple, industrial. This time he was holding a brick and a small hammer. The room was much smaller and the performances were longer so the event felt more intimate. He squatted near the entrance, placed the brick onto the floor then began using the hammer to slowly break it into rubble. Small flecks of red brick began to pool around his legs. The sounds of the chipping filled the small room.

When approximately half the brick was destroyed, he lowered his whole body onto the floor, placing himself onto his chest, and put his face next to a small section of the rubble. He then began moving forward, sliding slowly across the floor towards the middle of the room, while pushing this segment of rubble along with his face. He pushed his face hard into the floor as he did this, while his legs appeared immobilised. His movement seemed to be coming only from the upper part of his body. When he reached the middle of the room, he stood up, walked back to the rubble, and began again.

As I watched, I imagined interrupting his performance in a similar way to *Fall* but knew that these were a completely different set of dynamics within which this would have made no sense. In this context, it would have been an act of violence.

After a few rounds of the same action Matt's face was dirty with flecks of blood on his cheek. When the performance was over I helped him tidy as we talked.

I'm not sure if the show was already planned or if it was announced just after I saw this performance, but the college decided to put on another research exhibition in the same set of buildings as the ones in which I had worked with Joe. I signed up to take part in the performance, which was taking place in the same chapel as before.

I emailed Matt a few days later and asked how he would feel about repeating his work with the brick, in this upcoming show, under my name. In doing so, I wanted to repeat the aspect of *Zweikommasieben magazine II* that had felt like the most important part of that performance, and maybe the project itself; the act of taking or using the male body as a stand in for my own. I wanted to explore this act was something that could materialise the longing or desire to be otherwise in relation to the gendered body.

In some sense, I sought to make a similar work as the one with Joe but have this be formalised. I wanted to grasp, or move, not only a body, but the assemblage of Matt and his work. I saw this as an act of *detournement* in which I was both present and absent. As with Joe, I wondered what it would mean for me to spend the duration of Matt's performance in the space, alongside this sense of absent presence.

I imagined the silent conspiracy that our bodies formed during our fight, and how this might be enacted differently. I also saw this as a way of returning to and expanding on the power dynamics of my former practice, which hovered over all of these artworks, but weren't addressed. I decided to pay Matt to make the exchange more formal. In our emails he said he was keen because the 'worker' aesthetic was important to his

practice. His work involved him making himself subject to a process that somehow reduced or objectified him, and this became reflected in our exchange.

On the evening of the event he arrived at the chapel at the time we agreed, as the performances were timed. As the artists arrived, people created space by moving to the outer edges of the room.

Matt came out of the adjoining corridor in a brown suit. He walked into the middle of the room then began the same performance as before. Only now the distance he covered, as he pushed his body along the floor, was greater. His face appeared more and more bruised each time he got back up and walked back to the rubble. As before, he dragged his legs behind him each time he repeated the gesture. I didn't ask him but wondered about the choices that he had made; why his body seemed halved in this way. His legs did the walking while his torso did the dragging and pushing. Both appeared to be in the service of a command, or a series of commands.

I didn't know what I felt about the performance. I neither liked nor disliked it, which in itself seemed important. I didn't want his work to represent me in any way. Rather, it was him - his gender - but also the relationship between his gender and the performance that was the object of this *detournement*.

In the handout given to the audience, the performance was titled *Untitled by M. M. Page* (the title of Matt's performance and his name), while I was the artist. As I watched the performance I felt overwhelmed by the sense that those in the room that had seen it, and knew me, had probably tied his performance to me in some way. They may have imagined the performance as a collaboration, or him as performing my work, and I thought about them reading my volition into this work. What felt so

powerful about this was precisely that Matt's work remained opaque to me. I knew almost nothing about his process, methods or intent. In imagining myself reflected in the minds of others, as the originator of his actions, I felt tied to him in a different way to our previous encounter. At the same time, this work had felt like an echo of that encounter; one physical, the other imaginary or conceptual.

The main methodology of this work was the structure of the event, which I had encountered in the writing of Alain Badiou. I imagined this as something requiring what he terms 'fidelity', which comes into being only after the fact, through its instantiation within some form of recognition. I imagined that something about the unforeseen nature of an aspect of this performance, and then, the bringing of this into a space of representation *as* a performance, bound me and Matt in an event-like structure, tying us to something new and therefore binding us together in a novel form.

The event, in this sense, was not reducible to the performance itself, nor to the specific actions it contained. Rather, it was located in the rupture with what had previously been unthinkable within the terms of the work and its reconciliation into a new form, which demanded a retroactive sense-making. The event, in this sense, was not a spectacle but a shift in relation; something that could only be grasped through the commitment that followed it. In this way, the performance became a condition for something else to emerge, not fully visible at the time, but potentially transformative.

Although my body was absent from the performance itself, it was present in my broader imaginary of the work, as a series of acts or gestures that expanded beyond the exhibition space. I was not always visibly present in these but understood myself as being so, within a series of acts I imagined as a continuity.

Even though these artworks remained open, or partial, they allowed me to build something through their accretion. They were fragments but belonged to a whole, and through writing I understood that their totality was that of process, which needed to be traced back to a semblance of a beginning. To exist, my process needed to be narrativised. The question of how this (as yet internal, semi-private) process might gain a wider form of visibility or publicness, however, remained.

I articulated - and possibly only conceptualised - the following for the first time after this particular performance: that this work was centred on my relationship to my gender identity, that it was both autobiographical and confessional. When returning to the process of this practice and tracing it through, this felt clear. But this clarity contrasted with the semi-opaque nature of my practice, which, in itself, had allowed the kind of searching that sustained the project. It had allowed me to ask questions about myself and my body that did not feel otherwise sayable. I knew the above, on some level, all along, but it took time to put this knowledge into words and begin building the project around it anew.

My uncertainty about the performances themselves - the fact that they were fragmented, partial, circumstantial - all of this facilitated a process of reflexivity. These elements allowed the work to remain searching, both in relation to its form and its content. The two felt intertwined, anew, with each work, and this remained a significant aspect of the project. In each work, form and content remained questions, which left both (often frustratingly) unresolved - but it was this that enabled the process of searching. More than anything, this ongoing sense of irresolution brought me to the conclusion that this was, in fact, a position embedded in the project. It was neither a fear nor an unwillingness to complete the work or arrive at a particular

medium specificity or subject matter. Rather, resistance felt central to the meaning of the project and became something I needed to embrace for my practice to position itself as research.

With this, however, also came the politics embedded in the representational space my practice occupied. This initial sense of resistance, therefore, which was tied to my subject matter, came to be coupled with my growing unease about participating in the global art industry. In many ways, the latter resistance seemed just as embedded in my work, and just as much of a driver for my decisions, but separating and articulating them still felt difficult. They operated in parallel, sometimes intersecting and sometimes diverging. What seemed to bind the two, however, was a decisive resistance to closure - either conceptual or institutional, which remained crucial for the project.

Ultan Coil

Figure 11: Gafarova, M. *Ultan Coil* (2019)*. (Studio Process).

In the space between this artwork (*Ultan Coil*) and the prior (*Untitled - M.M. Page*) I reframed the project to reflect these insights. It was now firmly tied to gender, identity and the queer politics that these subjects compelled. The project was, as I imagined it, a series of encounters with the bodies of others that had allowed me to explore, within the remit of performance art, a prolonged encounter with my own. Further, I saw this as speaking to the absence of representation of transgender and gender-non-conforming experience in culture more broadly; the absence of nuanced, meaningful representation that sought to universalise rather than ghettoise this aspect of embodied experience.

I was reminded of Ultan by Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty.* I remembered that his name had a similar ring: *Ultan Coil.* At the time, it seemed extraordinary. He was someone I knew on a degree I did some years prior. He was around four or five years older than me when I knew him. After he came to mind, I decided to stay with him, to pull him into the project. I wondered what it would be like to work with someone who was only a memory.

One of my only recollections of him was watching him cycle in to the main square of the college then take off his shoes. Talc slowly fell from his socks, forming small clouds of dust that hung low to the ground. I was sitting on the pavement and watching him talking to the people beside me. The dust remained at my eye level. His cycling gear was worn and marked with years of use.

His masculinity felt tethered to his freedom; the freedom of his body, its movement, its connection to his bike; his lack of involvement in some aspects of the course - the way the requirements of the course seemed only a minor aspect of his life, which took place elsewhere.

When I thought of him, my first thought was how his name already provided an inroad into an artwork, because it reflected a strange amalgam of that which I had already explored - body and place (as I later learned, Ultan means 'man from Ulster'). I imagined this as another way of inhabiting the masculine form; tying Ultan to a place, then inhabiting this place in his stead. I imagined the conflation of him and place - stepping into him, stepping into his name, as a way of inhabiting him. I imagined this, too, as a return to the conflation of body and architecture or environment.

This felt like an extension of the literalness that had felt so important in some of my prior performances - attempts at becoming another that were physical, and therefore impossible. This impossibility materialised a certain scene of failure, which felt crucial in exploring this aspect of my identity and reclaiming it - not solely in relation to my body, but as a reclamation of gender non-conforming experience more widely and its relation to failure (the body's failure to correspond to itself, to 'fulfil' its biology).

The particularity of my subjects, my attempts to become particular men as opposed to male, felt like one of the most important aspects of my practice. It pulled the attempt into an embodied, material dimension. It made the attempt impossible. And in doing so it called to a tradition of conceptually oriented performance art in which this was central; the dialectical motion action and frame, in which the action would fail but the frame would succeed in containing it, framing this longing as something other than failure - re-inscribing it as an aspect of my experience.

What was different, however, was that I had now reframed the project, and this literalness was not central as it had been. I did not need to 'action' these gestures as I had done before because I was now speaking them.

I remembered that Ultan had been a cyclist and searched for him online. I found him on social media along with cycling routes he had completed. I decided to choose one of these routes and repeat it - to trace where his body had been with my own, and in doing so to tie mine to his. I chose one that began in Greenwich, London. I decided not to cycle the route, as I had no bike, but simply go and spend time in Greenwich.

A few days later I took the overground there. I brought a small video camera and a sound recorder. I decided to record the journey in order to frame the experience in the absence of the exhibition space, within which my other performances fell. This was the first performance in which I was enacting something with my own body, with no one else involved.

In Greenwich, I went to the location where the cycling route began, then walked around the town centre. I filmed the pier, the Cutty Sark and multiple streets. Most of the shots were wide and still, capturing an expanse of river, street or sky. As I was filming, I experienced my own gaze searching for Ultan, and this is what I then understood the film to contain. The camera stilled my gaze and my body and rooted it to the location as a way of allowing me the time to reflect on why I was there and what I was capturing.

While filming, I kept expecting Ultan to appear. More than anything, the experience reminded me of walking up and down Embankment, looking for someone I had lost. I knew they wouldn't be there but the act of looking felt like an incantation. I pressed my gaze into anyone who resembled them and I found myself doing the same now.

Towards the end of the day I walked into the long underwater walkway that connected the two sides of the river and made my way through to the opposite foreshore. I spent a last hour or so filming back towards Greenwich Pier.

At home, I searched for a way to edit the footage, but understood the more important aspect of this work: its poetic structure of resonances, moving from Ultan's name and unfolding into an action that took my body and gaze to a place where I found myself searching for Ultan's body to appear, a body that may also have been my own; a lived, material 'autopoiesis'. Something mediated by the camera, but not entirely, not in the way I felt my prior performances tethered to the exhibition space.

Conclusion

In a 2018 essay about legendary performance artist Anne Bean, Dominic Johnson asks how a practice such as hers, which succeeded in blurring the distinction of art and life, was nevertheless able to hold on to a sense of 'ontological reality' (ref-36). He asks: what cultural and theoretical contexts render it an object, despite itself? 'What is the shape and texture of the 'life-art' so inaugurated?' (Johnson, 2018, p. 36). This project began by exploring parallel concerns in relation to queer identity, for which a sense of ontological reality is likewise always at stake; a state of suspension that also engenders its ethics. This project explored this through a series of acts that likewise struggled with their sense of ontological reality while seeking to nominate this as a constituent feature of the practice. These artworks both posed and responded to, the following question:

If a queer politics of solidarity feels incongruous with art-as-industry, how can contemporary art practice engage with this paradox?

I found this question in seeking to understand the relationship between my practice and my (and its) queer identity, which I felt to be embedded in its form as much as in its subject matter. Yet the project did not begin with a clear notion of performance art or what it could offer. Rather, this developed through my intention to problematise a mode of representation in the act of making, which performance embodied. Further, the dynamic of *art and life* became an important touchstone for the project. In seeking to navigate the paradoxical demands of visibility and resistance for the queer body, to hold them on equal footing, this dynamic provided a correlate in the realm of art; something central to contemporary art's politics. Echoing Jasbir Puar in her writing on queer theories and their methodologies, I wanted my work to stay with this sense of contradiction. As she writes; 'with every encounter with contradiction that we embrace rather than deny, something moves' (Puar, 2021).

Yet my practice also sought to respond to this question with a proposition. To do so it explored the possibility of a temporary exterior to the institutional frame in which it was situated. Through this project, I found this sense of exteriority in an imaginary of my life, as though performance could found a *life praxis* rather than remain circumscribed as an object. The way in which my practice expresses this is idiosyncratic and may not be repeatable, but nevertheless presents a contribution to a continued reimagining of the body as a means of self-reflexivity in the realm of contemporary art. This sense of flight is always in dialogue with the queer body and what it offers us in the form of an ethics of interdependence; how, if accepted, these ethics pressure and hold our (cultural) work to account. In the writing below I briefly unfold three ways in which my practice responds to the question above by seeking this exteriority and tracing a line of flight.

Action-writing

The practice contained in this project responded to this question, first and foremost, by relaying between body and language; by building a narrative of these artworks over a number of years after they had been made. One of the main aspects of the practice throughout was the use of my own body. The work sought to 'action' - to live through - that which I was seeking to represent. An important reason for this was the production of narrative, whether verbalised or not - a process of linking myself to a series of actions to which I would later become subject, into which I could then read my intentions. It was in this way that my practice therefore enabled a form of self-reflexivity, a relay between acting and reflecting. The writing into which these artworks later fell became the means through which I was able to fully embody and reclaim these actions as my own and, therefore, also, to attempt a broader reclamation

of the experience explored in this work. In this way, the practice found the assemblage of 'action-writing' to be one of its most important methods in seeking to circumvent the predominance of the spatial in much contemporary art, and performance art more specifically. This echoed many of the neo-avant garde performance artists in their emphasis on a physical *outside*, which they then brought in via some form of documentation - artists such Vito Acconti (1969), Ana Mendieta (1976) and Bas Jan Ader (1971). My practice differed, however, in seeking to de-link the aura of the original event from its document. The writing produced was not intended to index or document these performances, exactly. Rather, even though the experiences described were firmly tethered to my truth, these texts sought to 'overwrite' them, to give them another life, in another medium (and therefore to keep this practice mobile). In this, an important teacher was the writing of Annie Ernaux, in whose work I found a significant counterpoint to both the methods and content of my writing. Her style of writing, which she describes as *not quite literature*, allowed me to realise that it was possible to set down in words, in the same way as I had always set down in images, experiences that were not fully digested or conceptualised; that writing could contain a liminality between experience and reflexivity - that it could make the process and craft of self-reflexivity visible in its very form, as her writing demonstrates. Later, I found this echoed in Jackie Stacey's and Lauren Berlant's assertions that critical, political autobiography today needs to entail exactly this - a loosening of our 'epistemological' hold on life.

This remained, until the end, a difficult aspect of the project. I came to it having rarely written, and never written at length, as well as journeying with dyslexia. Yet this was also one of the reasons the project leaned into such a problematic relation to representation: to compel language. In doing so, I found that this practice not only

allowed me to explore a reclamation of my gender identity, but also of my voice - a joint reclamation that was necessarily linked.

Imaginary choreographies

The other important way in which my practice responded to the question of searching for new representational ground - a (semi)autonomous realm - for my practice, was in its turn to imagined, largely private choreographies, that sometimes spanned the continuity of my artworks as a whole. In imagining the sequence of encounters, they hold, collectively, as a rhythm in itself - a 'striation' of my life during this research project. Sometimes, this rhythm existed solely within the bounds of a specific performance, as in *Zweikommasieben magazine I,* in which three identical magazines were placed on the floor, one of which was being read by Joe. These magazines meant that I could imagine his body, in the space, as part of a formal composition - an Annie Albers (1925) or an Agnes Martin (1960) - in which a return to a more basic exploration of representation (as resonance and repetition) could allow the work to do something other than simply place 'content' into the sphere of visibility provided by the exhibition space. As the performances took form, became narratives, unfolded as memories, the repetitions and associations that fell across the body of these works allowed me to explore alternative forms of mediality - tethered to time, rather than space. In doing so, the work confronted art's discursive and institutional monopoly on space with a practice leaning towards the condition of music - exploring private, or semi-private choreographies that utilised a heterogenous and not always assimilable number of things: bodies, encounters, words, objects. As Lauren Berlant describes in talking about the similar work of theorising, these artworks likewise sought to 'test out... what patterns might emerge, from within the life we are living, that can produce

forms that sustain worlds' (Duke University GFS, 2019, 26:35).[35] An important referent for this was the genre of contemporary, gallery-based choreographic performance (as opposed to contemporary dance). I imagined some of my artworks as an expanded form of this type of practice. In chapter three, the project briefly outlines why this type of performance felt both important and problematic for the project, as one of the main avenues for queer visibility in contemporary art today. In response, my own practice explores the choreographic as something moving beyond corporeal bodies and exhibition spaces; something occupying life in a much broader (and sometimes stranger) way. In doing so, these artworks speak to Foucault's illusive notion of an *aesthetics of existence.[36]*

Intimate publics

Finally, the way in which these works explored an alternative sphere of visibility was the way they confronted the relationship between artist and audience, central to performance art. My relationships with my participants remained brief and passing but they entailed a significant amount of mutual vulnerability. In these works, I was performing the artist, performing a certain knowledge - a certain justification for my practice - while asking the participants to perform in return. But much also felt unperformed, or un-anticipated; trust and curiosity were exchanged and intimacy risked. In doing so the work remained sensitive to the transformation engendered in the process of working with another, even though the practice itself was never

---

[35] In testing what patterns emerge, the project also asks what it might mean to lean into those modes of representation that we share with other beings: the resonances, repetitions and foldings through which we all, human and otherwise, make sense of our lives.

[36] This complex and under-defined concept appears in Foucault's later work on ethics and describes a self-formative relation to the self.

collaborative.[37] This contrasts a lot of participatory performance art today, which courts this transformative capacity as an object - staging or reifying it - but forecloses its possibility with the rigid dynamics of audience and performer. These works also shifted the intersubjective 'locale' of the artwork - from a sense of art's illimitable, global reach and communicability, to a far more fleeting, intimate scene of encounter. The normative relation of audience and performer was troubled, in each work, in favour of a smaller, more intimate fold of visibility - often simply between me and one other person. In this way the artworks performed a wilful reduction in their scope - a re-imagining of their public realm, which gestured towards a far more private (although not non-existent, or silent) form of practice; something akin to the many experiments in living one's art explored by artists throughout the 60s and 70s, such as experiments in communal living.[38] Here, art could be something inscribed into a small community, experienced only by those involved. Rather than courting a sense of exclusivity, however, the principle behind these experiments was to embed art firmly within life. My intention, however, was always to make these artworks more widely communicable, which is what the writing then endeavoured to do. And each of these artworks was made, of course, with a far broader imaginary audience in mind - my inevitable, internal sense of publicness. However, these works still courted the possibility of another kind of relation between artist and audience.

Dimensions of performance

---

[37] This echoes Peggy Phelan's emphasis on the mutually transformative capacity of performance art. As she writes: 'this potential, this seductive promise of possibility of mutual transformation, is extraordinarily important, because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical' (Phelan, 2003, p. 136).

[38] One example is the legacy of Butler's Wharf, in Bermondsey, London. From 1971 until the end of the decade over one hundred artists lived and worked in the building.

To further extend these propositions, the project then situates them within what performance theorist Jonah Westerman contends is essential to thinking performance art as a genre. As he writes, rather than a static genre, performance is 'an interrelated set of questions concerning how art relates to its audience and the wider social world' (Westerman, 2017). Westerman proposes a series of simple dynamics with which performance does so. Drawing on these, this project identifies the central dynamics within my own practice as:

- Document/Event

- Public/Private

- Artist/Audience

&

- Chance/constraint

These offer a way of further positioning the flight of a performance practice into a different mode of being; outside the context of a gallery; in a mode of writing that seeks to de-link copy and original; within a lived, internalised relation to the artwork as a composition (an 'autopoiesis'); and within the brief, tentative relationships formed with the participants. It was through these that I found my practice engaging with the dynamic of art and life in tangible, material terms. Further, in imagining these dynamics as a series of challenges to normative modes of representation within contemporary art, they can be further defined as:

- A challenge to the normative hold of the document as (value laden) index for the work of art; imagining art as 'formally mobile'; moving through a series of material instantiations. Resisting closure to any of these by seeking to de-link the aura of the original from its subsequent iteration in writing.

- A challenge to the emphasis on visibility within clearly demarcated and circumscribed space for much performance art today; re-imagining performance as a lived, embodied composition tied to life, body and memory. Re-inscribing finitude and mortality into the practice of performance.

- A challenge to the normative relation of artist/audience through artworks involving small-scale public intervention and interpersonal vulnerability. Using a degree of agonism to pressure the 'securitized' nature of interpersonal relations within the realm of performance. Re-articulating the value of risk.

<u>To value the immaterial</u>

In his essay On Art Activism (2014) Boris Groys writes, poignantly, 'Art activists want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place - but at the same time, they do not want to cease to be artists. And that is the point where theoretical, political and even purely practical problems arise' (Groys, 2014, p. 1). The performances contained in this project mirror the impossible condition of this provocation; they problematise their status as artworks at the expense of their capacity to give voice and form to something that calls for cultural representation. And yet, this refusal is that which takes a personal, lived experience and turns this into a politics; using this experience as a foundation from which to act in solidarity with those excluded from one's means of expressing this experience. In doing so, it turns expression into a site of (queer) protest or dissensus. This is how this project endeavours to be 'twice political' (Radio Papesse, 2010).

Further, in doing so, it mirrors the wider sites of social and cultural refusal on a troubled, dying planet. The degrowth movement[39] provides one significant context; a movement based within disciplines such as anti-colonialism, feminist political ecology and environmental justice. It contends that infinite economic growth and expansion are fundamentally at odds with finite planetary resources and seeks to re-image infrastructures rather than simply shrink or reduce capitalist economic systems. As Giorgos Kallas contends, the movement points us to the fact that in order to respond to the ecological crisis facing us we can do no less than change the nature of our institutions, the way we live our everyday lives and the stories we tell about ourselves.[40] In the realm of art, performance provides an important provocation to art as an institution because of its insistence on finitude. As Peggy Phelan writes, the political power of performance art was never in its opposition to objecthood or valorisations of liveness, but in this essential quality, probing us to ask; 'what does it take to value the immaterial?' (Phelan, 2003, p. 134).

Peggy Phelan wrote her seminal book *Unmarked* (1993) three years after Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* (1990). Both texts challenged the way political or creative forms of resistance often ceded to certain closures and argued for a different imaginary of aesthetic and political action, untethered to priorities of visibility. Although both texts subsequently received complex and probing critique, the conditions to which responded are still with us today. We still live within the 'relentless acquisitive drive of capitalism' (Phelan, 2003, p. 124) and yet we still

---

[39] A movement active since the 1970s but alive in many other forms since anti-industrialist activism of the 19th century.

[40] This last point reflects the project unfolded by author Amitav Ghosh in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), which probes the 'unthinkable' nature of the climate catastrophe and searches for literary modes through which it can be re-imagined and narrativized.

require the conditions of capitalism to mount this very critique, a fact that humbles

any attempt at a 'definitive revolutionary act' (Bernini, 2021, p. 129). Rather, as

Josephine Berry writes in her conclusion to *Art and (Bare) Life: A Biopolitical Inquiry*

(2018), the most available gesture may be less voluntarist:

> 'Perhaps only by letting go of art's compensatory freedoms, derived from the
>
> detrimental loss suffered by all other existence, will it be possible to confront
>
> the truly thanatopic power of late capitalism without illusions' (Berry, 2018, p.
>
> 321).

RCA Ethics <ethics@rca.ac.uk> (sent by robyn.... Thu, 8 Nov 2018, 16:07 ☆ ↩ ⋮

to Nicky, Rebecca, me ▾

Dear Maria,

Thank you for the additional documentation. Following the review of this, your Research Ethics Application has been approved.

Good luck with your future research.

Kind regards,

Research Ethics Team.

···

Bibliography

Books

Adorno, T. W. (1974). *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life.* Translated by Jephcott, E. F. N. London: Verso.

Adorno, T. W. (1998). *Aesthetic Theory.* Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Akerman, C. (2019). *My Mother Laughs.* Translated by Copp, C. United States: The Song Cave.

Badiou, A. (2013). *Being And Event.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Badiou, A. (2004). *Handbook of Inaesthetics.* Translated by Toscano, A. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells.* London: Verso.

Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics.* Translated by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods, France: Les Presses du réel

Bernini, L. (2021). *Queer Theories: An Introduction.* Translated by Baldo, M. and Basile, E. Oxon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Berry, J. (2018). *Art and (Bare) Life: A Biopolitical Inquiry.* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Brisley, S. and Tawadros, G. (2020). *The Stuart Brisley Interviews: Performance and its Afterlives.* London Bookworks.

Bürger, P. (1984). *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Butler, J. (1987). *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France.* New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York; London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex".* New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an Account of Oneself.* Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press.

Butler, J. (2015). *Senses of the Subject.* New York: Fordham University Press.

Butler, J. (2016). *When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

De Beauvoir, S. (2009). *The Second Sex.* Translated by Borde, C. and Malovany-Chevallier, S. London: Jonathan Cape

Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition.* Translated by Patton, P. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1994). *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Burchell, G. and Tomlinson, H. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1978). 'Cogito and the History of Madness' in *Writing and Difference.* Translated by Bass, A. London; New York: Routledge. pp. 36–76.

D'Emilio, J. (1983). 'Capitalism and Gay Identity'*,* in Snitow, A. Stansell, C, Thompson, S. (eds.) *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality.*New York: Monthly Review Press. pp. 100-113.

Duggan, L. (2002). 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in Castronovo, R., & Nelson, D. D. (eds.) *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics.* North Carolina: Duke University Press. pp. 175-194.

Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Ernaux, A. (2001). *Happening.* Translated by Leslie, T. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Ernaux, A. (2018). *The Years.* Translated by Strayer, A. L. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Ernaux, A. (2020). *A Man's Place.* Translated by Leslie, T. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Foucault, M. (1984.) 'What is Enlightenment?' in Rabinow, P. (ed.) *The Foucault Reader.* New York: Pantheon Books. p. 32.

Foucault, M. (1980). 'The Confession of The Flesh' in Colin, G. (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Goldin, N. (2003). *The Devil's Playground.* London: Phaidon.

Getsy, D. (2015) *Appearing Differently Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities.* Edited by Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar, and Hans Scheirl. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015, pp. 39-55

Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Haraway. D. J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Durham; London: Duke University Press.

Simson, H. and Teichmann, E. (2009) *Lulled Into Believing.* London: Henrietta Simson and Esther Teichmann.

Jacques, J. (2015). *Trans: A memoir.* London: Verso.

Jameson, F. (2015). *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso.

Johnson, D. (2015). *The Art Of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art.* London; New York: Palgrave, Macmillan.

Johnson, D. (2019). *Unlimited Action: The Performance of Extremity in the 1970s.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Johnson, D. (2018). 'Impossible Things: The Life Art of Anne Bean in The 1970s' in La Frenais, R. (ed.) *Anne Bean: Self Etc.* London: Live Art Development Agency and Intellect Books, pp. 24-36

Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space.* Translated by Nicholson-Smith, D. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lütticken, S. (2017). *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice After Autonomy.* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Mancini, M. and Perrella, G. (eds.) (2017). *Pasolini's Bodies and Places*. London: Edition Patrick Frey.

Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Massumi, B. (2011). *Semblance and event: activist philosophy and the occurrent arts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press.

Melville, H. (1962). *Billy Budd.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *The Return Of The Political.* London: Verso.

Osborne, P. (2002). *Conceptual Art.* London: Phaidon.

Osborne, P. (2018). *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays.* London: Verso.

Osborne, P. (2013). *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art.* London; New York: Verso.

Pasolini, P. P. (2014). *St. Paul.* Edited by Alain Badiou. London: Verso.

Phelan, P. (1996). *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,* UK: Routledge.

Puar, J. K. (2017). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Time.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Rancière, J. (2009). *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics.* Translated by Corcoran, S. London: Continuum.

Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (eds.) (2017). *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility.* Edited by Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Schorr, C. (2005). *Jens F*. Göttingen: Steidl MACK.

Sedgewick, E. K. (2008). *Epistemology of the Closet.* Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Sedgewick, E. K. (2002). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Illinois: University of Illinois Press. pp. 271–313.

Stakemeier, K., Vishmidt, M. (2016). *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art.* London: Mute.

Tillmans, W. (2003). *If one thing matters, everything matters.* London: Tate Publishing.

Tillmans, W. (2008). *Lighter.* Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

Holert, T. (2020). *Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics.* Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Virno, P. (2015). *When The Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Žižek, S. (2009). *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology.* London: Verso.

Exhibitions and live performances

AGM Report: Somerset House Studios (2019). [Performance].
Somerset House. London. 24 October 2019.

Masculinities, (2020). [Exhibition]. Barbican, London. 13 July 2020 - 23 August 2020.

Ragnar Kjartansson (2016). [Exhibition]. Barbican, London. 14 July 2016 - 4 September 2016.

Slug Horizons (2018). [Performance]. CoolTan Arts, London. 16 February 2018.

The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together - Baczynski-Jenkins, A. (2017). [Performance]. Chisenhale Gallery, London. 10 March, 2017.

Films

Beau Travail (1999). [DVD]. Directed by Claire Denis. France: Patrick Grandperret.

Close-Up (1991). [DVD]. Directed by Abbas Kiarostami. Iran: Kanun parvaresh fekri.

No Home Movie (2015). [Blu-ray]. Directed by Chantal Akerman. France: Liaison Cinématographique, Paradise Films.

Winter Sleep (2014). [Blu-ray]. Directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Turkey: NBC Film, Bredok Filmproduction, Memento Films Production, Zeynofilm.

La Forma Della Città (1974). [Film]. Directed by Brunatto, P. Italy.

Videos (online)

American University of Beirut (2012). *Homonationalism Gone Viral: Discipline, Control, &*
Affective Politics of Sensation. [Online video]. Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a0Dkn3SnWM (Accessed: 15 September 2018).

Berkeley Arts + Design (2017). *Judith Butler and Maggie Nelson: Gender, Identity, Memoir.*
[Online video]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-g9tKSy4WY (Accessed:
19 March 2017).

CLAGS: The Center for LGBTQ Studies (2019). A No-State "Solution": Inter/nationalism and the
Question of Queer Theory [Online video]. Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZzlW8UFSmY (Accessed 3 March 2021).

CPC Centre for Postdigital Cultures (2022a). *Coventry Cultural Theory: 'Personal Value,*
Impersonal Subjects' with Jackie Stacey. [Online video]. Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r9yyXn2ai8&list=PLzFRJSI8lQ6GtbwoNgxjdOrSwbQW3
k2ET&index=3 (Accessed: 12 June 2022).

Duke University GFS (2019)**.** *Feminist Theory Workshop. Keynote Speaker: Lauren Berlant.*
[Online video]. Available from: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7X6j0af7Bo* (Accessed: 2
June 2019).

Lbtavares Tavares (2015). *Judith Butler – 2/7- "Why Bodies Matter" – Gender Trouble...* [Online
video]. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVExYVYHe2I (Accessed: 24
January 2020).

Novara Media (2017). *What is Homonationalism?* [Online video]. Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l3shYm6Jao (Accessed: 16 April 2022).

Sonic Acts (2019). *Irit Rogoff – Becoming Research.* [Online video]. Available from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3AcgQoGaSU (Accessed: 21 June 2021).

Audio (online)

Ima-Abasi Okon in conversation with Marina Vishmidt (2019). Soundcloud. 20 August. Available at: https://soundcloud.com/chisenhale-gallery/ima-abasi-okon-in-conversation-with-marina-vishmidt

Artworks

Acconti, Vito. (1969). *Following Piece.* [Gelatin silver prints, felt-tip pen, and map on board]. Available from: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146947 (Accessed 29 June 2019).

Ader, Jan Bas (1971). *Broken Fall (Organic).* [Digitised 16mm film]. Available from: https://www.ubu.com/film/ader_selected.html (Accessed 2 April 2020).

Albers, A. (1926). *Design for Smyrna Rug.* [Watercolour, gouache, and graphite on paper]. Available from:
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/3735?artist_id=96&page=1&sov_referrer=artist (Accessed 5 October 2017).

Billingham, R. (1996). *Ray's a Laugh*. [Photographic prints] Barbican, London. (Accessed 20 August 2020).

Bruguera, T. (2012). *Immigrant Movement International*. Available from: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/tania-bruguera-immigrant-movement-international (Accessed 16 May 2022)

Eakins, T. (1883). *Thomas Eakins and John Laurie Wallace on a Beach.* [Photograph]. Available from: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/271890 (Accessed 5 October 2017).

Hamilton, A. (2018). *The Squash* [Performance]. Available from: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/squash (Accessed 10 September 2023).

Hardy, A. (2016). *Equilibrium (umph, ohwh, ah, clk clk).* [Diasec mounted c-type print] Maureen Paley, London. (Accessed 2 July 2016).

Kjartansson, R. (2017). *Take Me Here by the Dishwasher: Memorial for a Marriage* [Performance]. Available from: https://listasafnreykjavikur.is/en/exhibitions/performance-take-me-here-dishwasher-memorial-marriage (Accessed 9 September 2023).

Martin, A. (1960). *Untitled.* [Ink on paper]. Available from: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/34006?artist_id=3787&page=1&sov_referrer=artist (Accessed 6 October 2017).

McQueen, S. (2002-2015). *Ashes.* [Two-channel video installation]. Turner Contemporary, Margate. (Accessed 27 May 2021).

Mendieta, A. (1976). *Untitled. (Silueta Series, Mexico).* [Photograph, colour on paper]. Available from: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mendieta-untitled-silueta-series-mexico-t13356 (Accessed 10 October 2017).

Staal, J. (2012-2013). *New World Summit.* Available from: https://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/new-world-summit-utrecht/ (Accessed 22 August 2023)

Tillmans, W. (1995). *Deer Hirsch.* [Chromogenic print]. Available from: https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9649 (Accessed 07 April 2020)

Tillmans, W. (1997). *man pissing on a chair.* [Chromogenic print]. Available from: https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/89682-wolfgang-tillmans-man-pissing-on-a-chair (Accessed 11 August 2016).

Tillmans, W. (2002). *The Cock (kiss).* [Chromogenic print]. Available from: https://mcachicago.org/collection/items/wolfgang-tillmans/3050-anders-pulling-splinter-from-his-foot (Accessed 12 August 2016)

Tillmans, W. (2004). *Anders pulling splinter from his foot.*
[Chromogenic print]. Available from: https://mcachicago.org/collection/items/wolfgang-tillmans/3050-anders-pulling-splinter-from-his-foot (Accessed 12 August 2016)

Journal Articles

Berry, J. (2019). 'How to Explain Pictures to a Dying Human', *Journal of Contemporary Art, Culture and Theory.* 27/28, pp. 7-18.

Bishop, C. (2012). 'Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity', *JSTOR,* 140, pp. 91-112.

Bolt, B. (2008). 'A Performative Paradigm for the Creative Arts?', *Working Papers in Art and Design,* 5.

Butler, J. (2021). 'Why Read Hegel Now?' *Crisis & Critique*, 8(2), pp. 40-55.

Berlant, L. (2007). 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency), *Critical Inquiry,* 33(4), pp. 754-780.

Eng, D. L., Halberstam, J., Muñoz, J. E. (2005). 'Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now? - David L. Eng with Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz'. *Social Text,* 23(3-4), pp. 1-17.

Critchley, S. (2011). 'Is Utopianism Dead?', *Log*, 22, pp. 169–75.

Groys, B. (2014). 'On Art Activism', *e-flux Journal,* 56 (June).

Lütticken, S. (2016). 'Neither Autocracy nor Automatism: Notes on Autonomy and the Aesthetic', *e-flux Journal,* 69 (January).

O'Sullivan, S. (2001). 'The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation.' *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities,* 6(3), pp. 125-135.

Povinelli, E. (2015). 'Transgender Creeks and the Three Figures of Power in Late Liberalism', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 26(1), pp. 168–187.

Puar, J. K. (2013). 'Homonationalism As Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities', *Jindal Global Law Review Volume,* 4(2), (November)

Puar, J. K. (2005). 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text,* 23(3-4), (December). pp. 121–139.

Rosenberg, J. (2014) 'The Molecularization of Sexuality: On Some Primitivisms of the Present', *Theory & Event,* 17.2

Stark, H. (2014). 'Judith Butler's Post-Hegelian Ethics and the Problem with Recognition', *Feminist Theory*, 15(1), pp. 89-100

Phelan, P. (2003) 'Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart', *Journal Of Visual Culture,* 2(291)

Interviews

Puar, J. K. (2021). 'A Deep and Ongoing Dive into the Brutal Humanism that Undergirds Liberalism: An Interview with Jasbir K. Puar'. Interviewed by Oishik Sircar. *Humanity Journal.*

17 January. Available at: http://humanityjournal.org/issue11-3/a-deep-and-ongoing-dive-into-the-brutal-humanism-that-undergirds-liberalism-an-interview-with-jasbir-k-puar/ (Accessed: 20 April 2022).

Sexton, J. (2017).
'On Black Negativity, Or The Affirmation Of Nothing: Jared Sexton interviewed by Daniel Barber'. Interviewed by Daniel Colucciello Barber. *Society And Space.* 18 September. Available at: https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing (Accessed: 15 September 2020).

Blog entries

Berlant, L. (2011) 'Affect Theory Roundtable Questions, MLA 2012 Authors: Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, Jonathan Flatley, Neville Hoad, Heather Love, José E. Muñoz, Tavia Nyong'o. *Supervalentthought,* 9 December. Available at: https://supervalentthought.com/2011/12/09/affect-theory-roundtable-questions-mla-2012-authors-lauren-berlant-ann-cvetkovich-jonathan-flatley-neville-hoad-heather-love-jose-e-munoz-tavia-nyongo/ (Accessed 3 April 2022)

Butler, J. (2020) 'On Rethinking Vulnerability, Violence, Resistance', *Verso Books Blog,* 6 March. Available at: https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4583-judith-butler-on-rethinking-vulnerability-violence-resistance (Accessed 26 December 2018).

Halberstam, J. (2015) 'Straight Eye For the Queer Theorist: A Review of "Queer Theory Without Antinormativity"'. *Bullybloggers,* 12 September. Available at: https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2015/09/12/straight-eye-for-the-queer-theorist-a-review-of-queer-theory-without-antinormativity-by-jack-halberstam/ (Accessed 25 December 2018).

Wang, J. (2010a) 'Negative feminism, anti-social queer theory and the politics of hope.' *Tumblr,* 22 June. Available at: https://loneberry.tumblr.com/post/724635724/negative-feminism-anti-social-queer-theory-and (Accessed 12 December 2021).

Wang, J. (2010b) 'Queer survival, silence, visibility, censorship, and citizenship.' *Tumblr,* 3 December. Available at: https://loneberry.tumblr.com/post/2084393403/queer-survival-silence-visibility-censorship - (Accessed 12 December 2021).

Newspaper & magazine articles

Butler, J. (1992) 'The Body You Want: An Interview With Judith Butler', *Artforum,* September. Available at https://www.artforum.com/print/199209/the-body-you-want-an-inteview-with-judith-butler-33505 (Accessed: 15 January 2021).

Fraser, A. (2005) 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum,* September. Available at: https://www.artforum.com/print/200507/from-the-critique-of-institutions-to-an-institution-of-critique-9407 (Accessed: 21 March 2020).

Gessen, M. (2020) 'Judith Butler Wants Us to Reshape Our Rage', *New Yorker,* 9 February. Available at https://www.artforum.com/print/199209/the-body-you-want-an-inteview-with-judith-butler-33505 (Accessed: 16 January 2021).

Mauro, E. (2013). The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics, Journal of the Marxist Literary Group, 26.1-2, pp. 119-142. (Accessed: 15 January 2021).

Price, E. (2002) Excerpts from *sidekick*, Journal of Visual Art Practice, 2:1-2, pp. 108-112. (Accessed: 22 March 2020).

Thomson, P. (2013) 'The Frankfurt School, Part 2: Negative Dialectics', *Guardian,* 1 April. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/01/negative-dialectics-frankfurt-school-adorno (Accessed: 21 October 2018).

Web pages

e-flux (2017) 'Alex Baczynski-Jenkins: The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together' Revolution (2022). Available at: https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/72701/alex-baczynski-jenkinsthe-tremble-the-symptom-the-swell-and-the-hole-together/ (Accessed: 10 December 2021).

If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution (2022). Available at: https://ificantdance.org/ (Accessed: 9 December 2021).

Laurenfournier (2022). Available at: *https://www.laurenfournier.net/Autotheory* (Accessed: 1 September 2022).

Radio Papesse (2010). 'Freee Art Collective - The Counter-politics of embodied voice. Dave Beech, Andy Hewitt & Mel Jordan at the 2010 Liverpool Biennial'. Available at https://radiopapesse.org/en/archive/interviews/freee-art-collective-the-counter-politics-of-embodied-voice (Accessed: 17 October 2022).

Magazines

Bitzi, R., Neuhaus, M. and Schwegler, G. (2015) *Zweikommasieben Magazin*