

How to Escape a Self

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*Thank you to Willem van Weelden for advising on this thesis.
Thank you to Natalia Sánchez-Querubín for editing and
consultation. Thank you to Daniel Genser for design and
support. And thank you to Manel Esparbé i Gasca as head of
the DOGtime department.*

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Preface

My motivation in writing this thesis has been to investigate the formation of subjectivity and the nature of the self. More precisely, I examine if and how self and subjectivity can be manipulated and even escaped. Underlying these efforts is the suspicion that the self is dynamic, dispersed, and threaded through context, constructed by others as much as by ourselves, and ultimately, a multiplicity. Thus in my work, the self emerges as indeterminate, unstable, decentralized, non-essential, non-linear, and finally, unknowable and even not real. I have spent the majority of my life under tight subjective control. Focusing on notions of subjectivity and self has also been a way — to some degree, at least — to discover what has happened to me and what can be done about it now. In comparison, ideas about a coherent “individual self” feel outdated and insufficient.

In addition to self and subjectivity, the concept of *voice* is also essential to this thesis. I approach voice as a tool for interrogating self and subjectivity, in fact, I argue that the three are bound together. Voice and self continually co-evolve, etching and carving each other. Or, as Laurie Anderson says, “*Everything is recording.*”¹ Each section of this thesis discusses an artistic technique through which the notions and practices of voice are used to perform an escape from the self, respectively, these are portraiture, performance, and dreams. The results are three sections, each a “personal” narrative articulated by a different voice. I see these texts as forms of verbal drag. Creating each section has also involved developing backstories, referring to images, enlisting AI, and wearing costumes in pursuit of contacting (or rather, putting on) occult voices.

Each text is also written in a different style; after all, voice is linked with language too. More than merely a means for verbal and bodily communication, voice and language are housings for the culture and context that sculpts a person’s

subjectivity. In *A Voice and Nothing More*, Mladen Dolar frames this relationship in the following terms,

“What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body. The voice stems from the body, but is not its part, and it upholds language without belonging to it, yet, in this paradoxical topology, this is the only point they share” (73).

One may interpret Dolar as saying that while the voice seems to emanate from the body, the body does not contain it: *“Every emission of the voice is by its very essence ventriloquism” (79)*. We can think of the voice and self as traversing the borders of the body and being composed also of outside influences and forces.² Moreover, they harbor spectral imprints of experiences and unconscious hints of the context that forms them, whether intentional or otherwise. Said differently, subjectivity is not singular, but a manifold of different voices, not unlike what Karen Barad calls *“the stranger within”*:

*“According to QFT, perversity and monstrosity lie at the core of being — or rather, it is threaded through it. All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the “self,” and touching the “self” entails touching **the stranger within**. Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each “individual” always already includes all possible intra-actions with “itself” through all possible virtual others, including those (and itself) that are noncontemporaneous with itself. That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time. Indeterminacy is an un/doing of identity that unsettles the very foundations of non/being” (34:40).*

I operationalize the definitions mentioned above for voice and self into a method for stepping outside imposed subjectivities and discovering latent voices ordinarily unheard. The results

are documented in three sections, each conveying a different voice and, what I call different states of the formation of a self.

In the first narrative, I write from the perspective of Cindy Sherman's self portrait, "Untitled #205". The rough timbre and vocabulary of this voice reveals what she has been through as a victim of misrepresentation and plays with expectations created by aesthetics, speaking to the always contemporary nature of images. In the narrative, current context continually intermingles with all future and previous contexts that frame her image, including the context from which it was created and critiques. Untitled #205 accuses Sherman of using her countenance as a place to hide and investigates self portraiture as a site of projection and disappearance. Borders of the self are penetrated by social and cultural constructs, artists and others. Creating terrifying and hazy boundaries between outside and in.

The second text is narrated by a morose, gay vampire who longs to be as uninhibited as his idols Divine and Leigh Bowery. His archaic speech patterns, mixed with contemporary references reflect a subjectivity marked by an extremely long life. For this Dracula, drag becomes a tool for escaping a repressive state and the making of a monster. In his treatise, drag is not just a form of disguise or escape by way of disappearing into another. Instead, it is an embrace of the multiple personas or the "strangers within" and the leaky borders between self and other. Monster drag becomes a tool to investigate and throw-off assigned subjectivities while embracing the liberating potential of change.

The third narrative employs an AI chatbot to create multiple voices that flow into each other, reflecting the morphing potential of dreams and multiplicities of the self; a subjectivity made of many voices. The narrative transitions between a sophisticate, stoner and benevolent fairy godmother, suggesting a continual state of becoming. The unfixed tone obfuscates

any idea of a real voice. The choice to co-create dream vignettes with AI implies opening to outside non-human voices and their unforeseen potentials, while keeping a sharp eye on possibly catastrophic subjective effects.

Overall, this thesis is an artistic methodology for dialoguing with unseen others and monsters within and experimenting with voices and selves as things that one can put on and take off. I have done this in hopes that there may be freedom, or at least an opening, in touching the strangers within. Or as Dolar puts it, *“to look very closely at the ways of entrapment, and through this to work towards the way where the seemingly objective causality crushing us itself involves contingency and subjectivity, and the way we are inscribed in it gives us more power than we could ever hope for”* (Schuster 5). I see a measure of emancipation in these exercises of vocal drag.

Notions of voice and self transverse my visual work beyond this thesis. During my time as a student, I have worn wigs, fur and prosthetics to express alternate selves and tap into social and cultural influences, latencies, and voices — the things that make a self. I have also paired masks with very little clothing to embody a desire for and the impossibility of being seen. This thesis and the work that precedes have been experiments in showcasing how easily and absurdly the self and voice can change. The sections in this thesis form a chorus of forces creating a dynamic subjectivity, woven into and out of the other and made of materials outside my/self. Moreover, in this chorus, the self remains not entirely self-created but instead unlocatable and dispersed. In fact, as I write this thesis, I continue to learn that the self is nothing if not slippery and occult, cleverly hiding as only the self knows how, sliding away only to be seen again, already changed.

Self Portraits

(The Disappearance of Cindy Sherman)

This first writing experiment is written in the voice of Cindy Sherman's "Untitled #205", part of Sherman's *History Portraits* series referencing portrait styles, representations and archetypes from Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassical "masters." Sherman's "Untitled #205" alludes to Raphael's painting, *La Fornarina*. Historically, there is confusion over who exactly is pictured in *La Fornarina* (perhaps Raphael's actual lover Margherita Luti, or an archetypal representation of a witch, prostitute, belle donna...).³ The voice of "Untitled #205" feels used and misrepresented by both Cindy Sherman and Raphael, as she doesn't feel her "true self" comes through in their images. Robbed of a voice and used as a mere surface for their own devices, her agency is impinged.

"I" actually love Cindy Sherman's work. However, the voice of "Untitled #205" has serious objections.

In this writing experiment, the character in the portrait seems to take on a life of its own. Untitled #205 has been left to her

own devices since the recording of her image. Living her life. Continuing to evolve and grow beyond the image made, begging the questions: Do images have independence? Under the influence of culture, who has agency — artist, viewer or image? How are images and reality constructed by context? Can the voice be antithetical to its aesthetic?⁴

In the course of Untitled #205's rant, the myth of an essential, centralized self is eviscerated. It is hypothesized, instead, that the self is a continuously shifting product of context and virtual projection, composed of images, entities and unseen forces.

Untitled #205

Cindy Sherman. I don't know what she's done with me. Slipped into my skin like a poltergeist. Tits hanging out. Not even trying to conceal a goddamn morsel of dignity with what is so obviously just an old curtain pulled from some 1970's window frame. That fat fabric hem where a curtain rod's



supposed to go, flopped over, front and center for all to see. Got me looking like some kinda Madonna with a swollen belly. Well I'm not fuckin' pregnant, OK. I'm a *baker*. With a healthy appetite. I run my own business

for Chris' sake. And what about that tacky pink leg garter-cum-armband? Something out of a cheesy wedding photo where the groom is on his hands and knees peeling cheap satin from a bride's thigh with his dumb teeth. I swear to god, if I have one more dude trying to own my ass, I will lose it. I really will. Some people think I'm a witch or a "courtesan" or just some rando Belle Donna. Maybe I'm a little of all of that. I'm not gonna fuckin' say. That Raphael has some nuts though. That fucking armband shows up in his painting too. With his name all over it. What the hell is that supposed to be? Some kind of mark? Thinkin' I'm his property?? What I've done for him, you wish you knew...these artists are fuckin' killing me. Using me like some kind of hiding place. Cindy, especially, is a master of disappearance. You can't get a handle on her. In interviews she seems almost banal. A typical white lady from the suburbs. But she's wiley. Letting her self settle in. Sinking down. Receding into my facade. Disappearing into my representation. In her photographs, she becomes non-existent. Vanishing into whatever flavor-of-the-month character she's using. Does she even have a personality? Is she for real?⁵

Cindy's a thief if you ask me. She got almost four million

bucks for pimping out Untitled #96! The culture she's stealing from rewards her with so much fuckin' cash... But yeah, don't worry about Untitled #205 over here, I'll just keep shoveling bread. Me 'n' the menagerie of Untitled's will keep churning out images for the god damn art machine while Cindy's over here is saying stuff about "her" art like:

"When it really seems to suddenly click is when I don't even recognize what's in the mirror...I guess that's why I don't feel like it's me..." (Stokes 11:38).

"I see that doesn't have anything to do with me...that's how I know it works" (Dunlop 2:08).



"When I'm doing the characters, I really don't feel like it's something that grows out of my fantasy, my own dreams" (Forster 1:17).

So yeah, who's doing the work here? I think her body is just some sort of canvas for the main attraction. Namely yours truly. I mean, listen to John Waters and Cindy going on about the "icooonic" quality of her "Untitled Film Stills":

JW: A lot of people think they're stills from a movie, but none of them are references to specific directors, are they?

CS: No, no, no, no, no.

*JW: This is why I think they're so brilliant. They weren't done with one director in mind, but you saw all of those directors' movies—so **they were in you** (Respini 69).*

"IN". "YOU". You see, Cindy Sherman isn't alone. Cindy Sherman isn't even there. Cindy Sherman has a billion different fucking people jammed inside her. Constructing her.

Doing the work. Cindy Sherman is a giant fucking conglomeration of social and cultural inputs and referents stuffed inside a Cindy. Stretched out and connected to a kajillion other inputs and referents. A Cindy is constructed of and entangled in a trashy mesh of films and fables and morals... eaten up and spewed back out as a fucking garbage pile of signifiers and archetypes, and then projected back all over again by gawkers thinking they know what this shit is *really* about.

I know in that big time documentary Sherman says “Nobody’s Here But Me”, but I’m just not buying it. Even if she were there, her photos are so ambiguous they end up being projections for people to throw their own cramped little ideologies onto. I mean, you hear people go on and on throwing narratives about “the male gaze” and “feminism” all over Cindy’s work. But Cindy never really even had the fuckin’ gall to call herself *or* her work outright feminist.⁶



But, I mean, you can't blame people for assigning all these narratives. That's exactly what she wants you to do. Or doesn't know she wants you to do. She's practically begging for it. She even admits it.

“I often don't know what I'm going after until after it's shot. It's amusing how far someone can stretch my intentions and make a concept that fits their theories.”

“What I was trying to do was to make people make up stories about the character, basically so that they could imagine a whole film perhaps based around that character. So a lot of the women are almost expressionless, like they have just experienced or are about to experience something, and it's sort of left up in the air as to what's gonna happen, so it hopefully stirs a lot of memories” (Stokes 17:35).

She's really just outing herself *and* her work as socially con-

structed. Portraying all these different people she could have been if the variables were different. If she lived in another fuckin' town, or saw different fuckin' movies, or had different fuckin' friends with different fuckin' views. "She" isn't doing *anything!* *You're* doing all the work! *Your* memories, *your* experiences, *your* context are filling in the whole thing!

When you first look at Cindy's photos you think, "I recognize this person. I recognize this film. I know this style." At first glance, you miiiiight even think it's a painting. But then you quickly realize just how bad it is, right? How theatrical. How fake. How fucking unconvincing. This is a set. With harsh shadows. Cheap, wrinkled backdrops. It's a caricature. But somehow real. You feel like you know this person. As much as you can know anyone. Which is probably not fucking at all. We see people in

broooooaaad strokes. And line 'em all up into categories. Shorthand for people. That's how everybody sees everybody. It's like that one time I got bangs and



no one fuckin' recognized me. People just see the person with bangs, or the person with glasses, or the person with the weird mole. We know what a person fuckin' looks like, but we don't know what a person *iiiiiiii*ssss like. I dunno what it's like to be you, and you don't know what it's like to be me. Maybe I don't even know what it's like to be me. It's probably like some sort of Graham Harman Bruno Latour bullshit where everything is withdrawn and unknowable or whatever.⁷ And so we just layer our own shit on it. Which isn't really even our shit! And that's why these images are so deliciously, relatably fuckin'... blank. Even her constant, nauseating use of "Untitled" leaves these images wiiide open for interpretation. They're just vehicles for projection! Projecting your own goddamn fears. Fears of getting old, fears of violence, ugliness, loneliness, other-

ness...blah blah blah. You know what your shit is.

We project different versions of our selves, too. Not just onto art. Onto other people. Animals. Objects. In our everyday lives. The theatricality of identity, right? Sounds like something that peach Judith Butler would say. Ugh. Performativity and all that. I feel like I want to puke when I say it. Such a frickin' cliché. But Judith's got a point. I mean, look at Cindy. She used to rock up to her work as a receptionist dressed like whatever goddamn character she was taking advantage of that



Cindy Sherman, Untitled #140, 1985

day because she lost track of time in the “real” world. She even created personas for walking down the fuckin' street. Just to have the guts to nut up and face the danger she thought was lurking around every corner of New York City at night.

“I’ve gone through many stages where I had, like a boy’s haircut, and the punk stage where you just wear sunglasses on the street almost like a little suit so that, nobody can even tell you’re a woman maybe. I mean, there are a lot of levels of dealing with it, but I think I also just started trying to look like as mean of a person as they were trying to be...” (Stokes 6:40).

Like, really? Indoor and outdoor personas? Cindy said her “early work was more about creating still lifes in a way”. Which is kind of ironic if you ask me. Since the squirrely little brains of anyone looking at the stuff takes it in a million fuckin' directions. Like she said about the chicks in those goddamn film stills, you get the very distinct feeling they're caught in some janky scenario. It's not pictured. But you just frickin' know

something is about to happen. Or has just happened. And there's this itchy, fuckin' tension of being caught between the action. And, there's your brain shooting off all over the place, creating a whole fuckin' story, the whole scenario playing out in your stupid head. Filling in the blanks. It's a virtual fuckin' situation. It's not real. But, somehow the broad in this picture is now all tied up in your shit. In this totally unpredictable, fake but current context. And then it goes on living in your brain and becomes part of your whole fuckin' deal. It's fuckin' weird.

It's like stepping into a diorama. You know, like the ones at the NYC Museum of Natural History. Behind the glass with the stuffed bears 'n' shit.

And the painted backdrops. With fake trees and all that dried grass.

You're in this whole frozen fuckin' environment. But it's kind of fuckin' awesome because you feel like maybe you've stepped back in time, or this frozen chunk of time has been transported to the future or another



Cindy Sherman, Untitled Film Still #48, 1979

place. This sort of world within a world. And it's supposed to be some copy of a real landscape or a representation of a possible landscape but it's like, OG physical VR or something. You're in it and your brain just sort of frolics all over that fake-ass fuckin' landscape and suddenly you're having this real fuckin' experience right fuckin' now, and, I dunno. It's like these animals and this whole fuckin' scenario could spring to life at any moment, and then it kind of does. In this in-between, half virtual/half physical sorta way. It's just like, really fuckin' cool. I guess hanging out in a diorama is like hanging

out in a memory or some shit. It's uncanny.

They say something is freaky or uncanny when you can't quite tell if it's alive or dead. It's something in between. Like there's this uncertainty. And it makes you really fuckin' nervous. Well there's a lot of frickin' in-betweenness in Sherman's photos. Fake tits and asses. Strapped on like a body somewhere between flesh and plastic. And this playin' all around and in between high-brow and low-brow shit. Fancy lookin' broads



Cindy Sherman, Untitled #466, 2008

with fake press-on nails and god awful wigs. Getting swirled all around between high fashion and drag, 1950's sitcoms and pornos, historic renaissance art and Instagram. All blended up to show a little bit of "truth" about what each thing is. And takin' the piss out of it.

I have to say, I'm kind of into that freaky in-between crap. That spooky, uncanny shit *definitely* shows up in Cindy's stuff. Like, this seriously dark fuckin' undercurrent of death and ugliness. Some reeeaaaaally fucked up shit. You would never think she could pull that off.

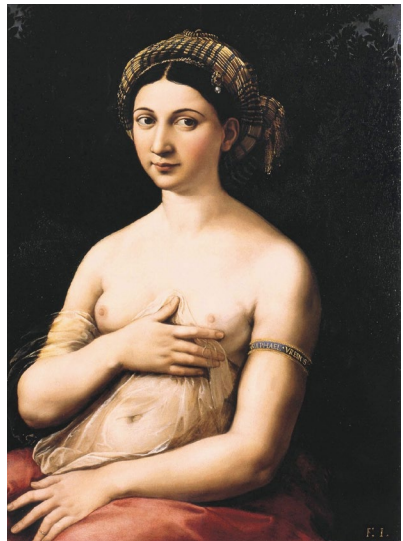
But I gotta hand it to her. Like with that Disasters and Fairy Tales shit. Damn. She went from inhabiting all these victim types, to being a fuckin' ghoul in a horrorscape. Like, fairy tales are not typically safe places for chicks to be, but in those fairy tales she becomes the monster and just fuckin' owns it. I guess watching all those horror movies paid off.⁸

In horror movies, the monster usually shows up as this scary

stranger right? The outsider. Prowling the line between self and fucked up other. Stirring up all that lurking, freakin' danger outside the self. What's outside is always scary, right? I mean, Cindy first started working alone in her studio because she was *literally* afraid to go outside (Stokes 6:01). But one look at that giddy pig with a prosthetic nose, battered face staring dead-on into the camera, and you know the monsters have followed her into the fuckin' studio. The other is inside. And it's a fuckin' hoot.



Cindy Sherman, Untitled #205, 1989



Raphael, La Fornarina, 1518-1519

What

is a

monster?

"The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities, and so we need monsters - and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities."

- J. Halberstam

Monsters are creatures who don't uphold borders. They are mash-ups. Blurry conglomerations of multiple entities. A little of this, mixed with a little of that. Unsteady, and unfixed. Positively ruining boundaries. Resisting definition. Their altered states change the cultures and bodies around them and vice versa. An unending process of consumption and transmutation. Continually confusing what one is.

A monster is anyone who has invoked the transgression of transformation. This transition inevitably creates some kind of trauma. Trauma itself can cause a transition. Of who you were before and after. Birthing a new self.

A monster is an alien other, an outsider. Often venturing beyond the boundaries of accepted morality and good taste.

A monster rejects the given self. The self that is expected. The self they always thought you should be.

The border of the monster is subject to change.

Performing Drag

(The Monster Mash)

Dracula is the super ego of the thesis. Moderating the more flamboyant and unhinged other voices. He is somewhat closeted and calculating. Always dressed in black. Always reserved. Even his movements are slow and calculating. His lifestyle was once quite glamorous. But after years of repression, he finds himself padding around his modest flat in his lounge cape. Morose. Often with a glass of red.

He was born in another country, but won't say where. Fear of the foreign other is already too great. He has perfected his English accent to become as undetected as possible. (Similar to the way Leigh Bowery eschewed his Australian accent when he moved to London. Minus the lack of detection.) Bram Stoker's Dracula was also a foreigner in England. A tale that could be read as a threat to "Englishness" itself. Of course no matter how hard he tries, he never quite passes as a typical Englishman. Akin to John Waters, he's an outsider even among his own minority (Waters 1). Not neatly fitting into a particular scene.

This Dracula is a conglomeration of many Draculas. An involution among many. With over 200 film adaptations since Bram Stoker's novel, and many vampire myths predating it as well, Dracula is perhaps the most reproduced monster in history. A product, in part, of silence. As Judith (now Jack) Halberstam noted "*The vampire, indeed, has no voice, he is read and written by all the other characters in the novel...his only speeches are recorded conversations with Jonathan Harker*" (91). The vampire is aesthetics and action, without a voice. In this silence, Dracula becomes open to interpretation. A perfect blankness to project all manner of fears. A vessel for general monstrosity.

"Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science, and psychopathology. He is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the consummate gaze but is scrutinized in

all things, he lives forever but can be killed. Dracula is indeed not simply a monster but a technology of monstrosity” (88).

This particular Dracula is also queer. But aren't all Draculas really? The story a reflection of the author's complicated relationship with his own sexuality? And the rightful fear of how Victorian England would view it? Oscar Wilde was imprisoned shortly before Dracula's writing. Although Stoker was close with Oscar Wilde, he curiously never mentioned their relationship in writing (Schaffer 381). He did have several written exchanges with Walt Whitman, one of which seemed to be a testament of queer of love.⁹

In the novel, when approached by several vampires, Harker admits *“I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire they would kiss me with those red lips” (Stoker 145)*. Gender ambiguity, polyamory, queer desire and many more references to ruby red lips are found in Bram Stoker's Dracula.¹⁰ Strange that queerness is not more frequently portrayed in vampire films and stories (though in an indirect sense, villains are notoriously coded queer).

The temperance of our thesis Dracula is a counterpoint to the more glittering figures that we will discuss: The comparatively brazen Divine and Leigh Bowery and their multidirectional influences. While rarely allowing himself such flamboyance, our Dracula has a quiet admiration for the monsters who brazenly let it all hang out. Especially those that defy categories. Those who have recognised what was put upon them, and leveraged it for change.

Our Dracula feels repressed by the projections of others and a life he did not choose. A life that was forced upon him after being involuntarily bitten. He now suffers the projections of both those in fear of him and the expectations of those that created him. He has isolated himself, finding alternate acquisition of sustenance, so as to not impose the trauma of this life

on others. He longs for something different.

He has a soft spot for drag and its powers of transformation. And has secretly dressed in drag during the day, after getting tipsy on some particularly good hemoglobin. He favors drag that ventures beyond gender to something even more confusing: monster drag.

Repressed and depressed after living so long, Dracula writes a letter to an unidentified reader in an effort to connect with his agency. A meditation on monsters as an attempt to convince himself that something new is possible.

D/Repressed Dracula

Birth of a monster¹¹

Becoming a monster is all too facile, my dearest. By birth, by happenstance, or by brute force. I, myself, was turned against my will, forced into this interminable existence. And poor Glenn Milstead; he was marked at the tender age of 10, when a physician declared him more feminine than masculine. The children could sense the peculiar in him as they would prowl for him after school, waiting to defend their territory — the demarcation between normalcy and abnormality. They feared that the same transformation could befall them, that their corporeal forms, already in flux, would shift beyond reparation. They knew deep within their hearts that the monster lurks in every one of us, we are all precariously poised on the brink, a trifling shift in circumstances and the veil is lifted — there is no genuine self, only identities projected upon us. These expectations placed upon us are nought but masks. There is nothing certain in what is imposed upon us. All is merely prescribed identities. Those children could not perceive the joy in change, but I have seen it all.

It required a considerable passage of time for poor Glenn to perceive the beauty in metamorphosis as well. He was a reclusive youth, never venturing from the domicile until he attained the age of 16. Even then, it would be several more years ere he would meet John Waters who would christen him Divine and provide an avenue of escape. Leigh Bowery, too, was a well-mannered child, and could be rather timid and self-conscious, even after discovering the tool of fabricated selves.

Metamorphosis is savage, my love. It can be both a curse and

a blessing. Caterpillars transmute into butterflies, indeed, but it is not without its own barbarity. The caterpillar must succumb to utter disintegration. We are eternally shattered, my dearest. That brokenness can never be erased. We shall never be ordinary. This savagery shall render our lives more arduous, my love, but, it may also render them more wondrous.

To be certain, to transform deliberately is no less barbarous. Simply inquire of the abraded skin of Leigh Bowery's chest after fabricating breasts with nothing more than duct tape and his own flesh. Night after night, bringing forth a new persona, as well as his friend and partner and wife Nicola, both of them oozing with artificial blood and entrails, inspired by the wonderful Dawn Davenport birthing scene in *Female Trouble*. The *Divine* and *Waters* films are replete with anti-natural birth, such as the black market lesbian baby ring where children are conceived by means of self-gratification and a syringe. Vampires, too, know something of anti-natural reproduction, my own rebirth into this eternal existence, of course, being super-natural.

And yet, somehow, despite this extraordinary beginning, I have not mustered the courage to construct anew. I have learned to keep my self concealed, perpetually enacting the role of the outsider, never quite belonging. I find myself repeating the age-old ways of the vampire, oscillating between the archetypal bat, werewolf and vampire, endeavoring to avoid detection.¹²

Fear of the monster

But can one truly blame me for feeling confined within these somber walls? The world beyond is a cruel and unforgiving place for beings such as ourselves. As if the constant fear of wooden stakes and silver bullets were not enough, the recent

tragedy at an American drag bar, where outcast creatures seeking kinship and a morsel of joy were cruelly murdered, has left me bereft. How can they seek to exterminate us when they too are monsters? It seems the label depends on whether it is conferred or claimed. Life beyond our realm is formidable enough, but to be loathed and hunted, abandoning us to perpetual fear of pitchforks or firearms, it is too much to bear. Certainly, these monsters are in terror of us too, fearing the constructed parameters of their mundane lives shall crumble, an abundance of energy expended on self-abhorrence and trepidation of the unknown. It is a bitter existence.

Even an act as seemingly innocuous as perusing my Instagram scroll is fraught. Beholding performance artist and Divine fan, Lewis G. Burton, reveling in an Evanescence remix while lip-syncing “save me from the dark”, brings a glimmer of joy to my heart, but witnessing that exuberance dashed against the venomous comments section, by those who cannot abide the notion of one so corpulent, so queer, or so trans relishing emancipation, annihilating any part of themselves they see reflected, rends my heart (@lewisgburton). For centuries, I have observed such hate. We are outcasts. Doomed. Yet somehow, there is joy.

I dare only imagine what these cruel gentlemen would make of Lewis’s Hermaphrodite music film. Another anti-natural birth tableau showcasing wonderfully grotesque Hermaphroditus in lieu of Venus, accompanied by grizzly surgical scenes condemning “corrective” surgeries carried out on intersex infants (Hall). A surfeit of apprehension surrounds the ambiguous “sex.” It causes me to ponder how dear Leigh felt about the surgeries he underwent as a child. His confidante Sue Tilley relayed in her biography that Leigh “*had to have several operations as a child because his testicles did not drop*” (12). I am unaware of the precise rationale for those surgeries, but if they were born of a fearful medical community imposing standard genitals and reproduction, the outcome was decid-

edly contrary. Leigh spent many a club night ruthlessly taping those genitals out of the way to make room for a sumptuous merkin. In addition, his aunt instructed him in the art of crochet during his surgical convalescence, kindling his passion for gender-bent costume creation.

I crave this endowment of courage to break free of my drab and predictable black garb. Leigh perceived the potential of costume. He understood the power it wielded to alter the comportment and experience of the wearer, and those in their presence. To permit one to behave differently, to transform the relationship to a body and its environs, to contact concealed facets of the self and others. He understood that exteriors should not be underestimated, that aesthetics can become identities. He employed drag as an implement for far more than imitating mere binary caricatures, he used it to fashion something genuinely other, verily monstrous, to defy legibility and muddle categories, thereby engendering wondrous potential. He blurred the boundaries between theatrical and social, high-brow and low, human and object, engaging his body in a relentless pursuit of self-construction. Whereas I, alas, find myself ensnared by the constraints of my safely predictable raven attire.

Divine also possessed the great gift of perplexing drag. As John Waters often recounts, Divine harbored no desire to *“pass as a woman; he wanted to pass as a monster.”*¹³ And Pat Morgan, that singular character, once admiringly dubbed Divine a *“drag terrorist”* proclaiming *“There wasn’t a self-respecting drag queen from here to San Francisco who wanted anything to do with that look...Drag queens thought ‘oh my god what is this’ and straight people thought ‘oh my god what is this...’”* (Schwarz). I recall the drag of that era was centered around the art of assimilation, to appear as “real” as possible, the aspiration of “passing” as a woman in mainstream society. An enormous debt is owed to these pioneering queens. Indeed, I can attest to the yearning of the eternal outsider to

blend in. Yet Divine confounded these constraints. Divine bewildered drag to the brink of anarchy, and through this chaos, forged a novel void in which other monsters could be born.



Alien, Drag Artist Shrek, 2022

From *Bodybuilders*, a book of photographs showcasing artists practicing the act of self-assembly.

Identity as mask

Leigh's performances were not confined to dimly lit clubs of the night. He was consciously performing at all times. During daylight hours, he would promenade among the ordinary, donning the guise of a "*dirty old man*", clad in shabby garments and a conspicuously tattered wig. He sought to provoke a reaction, to be perceived as an oddity, granting passersby the pleasure of something upon which to remark. His friend and collaborator, Michael Clark, has spoken of how Leigh delighted in eliciting a "*what the fuck was that*" response (Bateman). Dear Leigh reveled in confounding people, prompting them to ponder what they were witnessing. He was a master of submerging parts of himself whilst surfacing others, to the extent that no one truly knew who Leigh was, including himself.

Of course, there was a similar perplexity with Divine. I recall many interviewers endeavoring to decipher where the character ceased and the person began. When posed with the query "are you really Divine?", he would often underscore a distinction between Divine the performer and Divine the individual, yet he would also concede, "*We all have our other sides that we don't show to other people, or sometimes don't even know that we have*" (Schwarz). How accurate this observation is. I am certain there are strangers lurking within us all — an eternity of mutable and potential others. Why can I not allow them to be unveiled?

Perhaps for the selfsame reason interviewers find it difficult to grasp. While perusing a recent Artspace Magazine, I observed a headline that begged "Who, or What, Is Puppies Puppies? Meet the Art World's Most "Huh?" Viral Sensation" The article's title hovered over an image of the artist, Puppies Puppies, donning an amusing Sponge Bob Square Pants costume. When asked "*Are you Puppies Puppies, or is Puppies Puppies a character that you're playing?*" she answered "*It's all the same at this point*" (Kerr). You see, Jade Kuriki-Olivo answers

to Puppies both in her “real life” and her art life, much like Glenn before her, who went by Divine both on and off the stage.

I find myself envious of the manner in which Divine, Leigh, and Puppies flourish amidst the unsteady blurriness betwixt life and art. I am ill at ease with being something unstable and in between. Am I a bat, a vampire, or a werewolf? Distinct beings or mere expressions of the same entity? Where do “I”

go when transitioning from one to the next?

If I know Judith Butler, she would explicate, *“Divine... whose impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. Her/his performance destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operates. Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established”* (XXXI)?



Claude Cahun, *I Am in Training Don't Kiss Me*, 1927

And from my days conversing with the esteemed Claude Cahun, I am certain they would declare, *“Shuffle the cards. Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me.”* “I is another—and always

multiple.” I know that for my cherished Cahun, the self is a masquerade. Elusive and unfixd. Concealed, unknowable, and effortlessly altered. As they so poetically mused, “*Behind this mask another mask, I will never finish lifting up all these faces*” (Shaw). I suppose all selves are but a performance, donned like a mask.¹⁴



Fergus Greer, Leigh Bowery, Session II, Look 9, 1989

In Leigh's oeuvre, there was perpetual tension betwixt being visible and unseen. He was perfectly amenable to strip himself bare, yet just as oft' opted to conceal. He would bewilder indications of the human until they metamorphosed into objects. He would subjugate his body to whatever torment was requisite to attain his desired appearance, his chest lacerated and exquisitely bleeding from gaffer tape, unable to relieve himself the entire evening due to his nether regions being glued and strapped behind artificial hair... And his looks grew increasingly veiled, the identifiable self disappearing, altering his body beyond facile recognition with the assistance of floral or bejeweled gimp-like hoods enshrouding most of his visage, functioning light bulbs integrated with mortal flesh, abstracted sculptural appendages, with an outsized and shapely footless black latex leg, head supplanted entirely by a immense puffball, mirroring a protruding and spherical abdomen with cartoonish, mushroom feet.

What stark contrast to Freud's tenderly monstrous paintings of Leigh. The portraits wherein his eyes are closed or his back averted, seemingly oblivious to the gaze of an audience or artist, almost incongruous to the knowing spectacle of his own work. Soft, human flesh bereft of cover, vulnerable and monumental, though I'm not sure unmasked.

Perhaps, one day, I shall shed my cape.

Drag eats culture

Dear Divine was an amalgamation. An amplified rendition of both Divine and John's idol, Jayne Mansfield, suffused with a touch of Clarabell the Clown and a dash of Godzilla. Hairline retracted to mid scalp, accommodating ferociously arched eyebrows.



John Waters, *Divine in Pink Flamingos*, 1972

Jayne Mansfield's blond bombshell persona itself was a heightened, some would deem more crude, incarnation of Marilyn Monroe's aesthetic. A sort of flattened reproduction of Monroe, bereft of certain detail and replenished with another interpretation, leaving behind a caricature of what was initially also a caricature of 1950s femininity. All of this is, verily, drag.

Drag devours culture and spews it forth slightly askew, illuminating the absurdity of social acceptability, ingesting values and expectations, then contorting them akin to a funhouse mirror. Encompassing the past and the future, as the present ever does. Dynamic and woven through everything. Divine as a caricature of Mansfield, Mansfield a caricature of Monroe, mimicking and revivifying culture, history embodied and made anew, archetypes reflecting culture back upon itself. As a vampire, I am well aware that the past is perpetually present, and the present is ceaselessly changing. Images are not innocent; they are promiscuous, they permeate us, are threaded through us. Culture and context are inextricable from the self.

Divine and Leigh Bowery and their multidirectional influences serve as exemplars of how we are not isolated entities, but

rather, dispersed and entwined with the influences that mold us.

Like Dorian Electra appropriating John Waters' maniacally slender pencil mustache, which is also a perverse involution of the 1930's style. Equally dignified and depraved. Demure yet seedy. A somehow contemporary emblem of the degenerate. Shifting in and out of time on the visages of:

Gomez Addams,
Vincent Price,
Prince,
Little Richard,
and Paul B. Preciado on the cover of *Testo Junkie*.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, too, began with a mustache.¹⁵

Influences forge us. They rub off and infiltrate us. As Timothy Morton avers, "*Coexistence is in our face: it is our face. We are made of nonhuman and nonsentient and nonliving entities. It's not a cozy situation: it's a spooky, uncanny situation*" (130).

I must believe that drag is an instrument for deliberate change, for acknowledging the subjectivities assigned to us, the forces, influences and entities that shape us, and to partake in their construction. To have a voice. To exercise agency and embrace transformation.

Escaping a self as an avenue of egress. As a way out, as Preciado would say. An exit. Perhaps into another cage, but a cage of your choosing.¹⁶

You can embody someone else. Indeed, you already do.



Devon Elliott, 2022

Virtual Dreams

(Weird Potentials)

*“A dream is not reality but who’s to say which is which?” —
Lewis Carroll*

Our third voice takes the form of a lucid dreaming creature. Narrating the experience of being aware that they are dreaming. In the lucid dream, you are both constructing and being constructed. Agency is a relationship between dreamer and dream. The self a virtual avatar in one’s own mind, or self within a self. In a lucid dream, borders between dream and “reality” are squishy. In the process of training to lucid dream, one is taught to question reality while awake to encourage that ability while asleep. Causing the barrier between wakefulness and dream to become increasingly blurry.

Dreams are virtual. Not only simulations of the not yet actualized. But a realm of pure potential, where the self can be escaped. *“The virtual for Massumi, as for Deleuze, is synonymous with potential, and more particularly, event potential. It is not another plane of reality, rather it ‘composes reality and, in*

itself, contains all possible realities'. The virtual can thus open up, as enthused by Guattari, 'fabulous possibilities of liberation'" (Bozalek 846).

For Deleuze, the virtual is seen as a realm of potentiality, containing all possible states, from which the actual is derived through a process of differentiation (Bluemink). In this sense, dreams can be seen as a manifestation of the virtual, representing potential experiences or states of being that are not currently actualized in the physical world (Deleuze 149).

In Karen Barad's quantum field theory, matter is also threaded through the virtual. Indeterminate virtual particles mingle with the void, creating infinite potentials. Electrons are drag-performing chimeras existing in a dreamlike state. Continually transitioning and transforming in a perpetual state of becoming.¹⁷ In this quantum field theory, nothing is fixed. And so the self too is an unfixed conglomeration. Not self-contained. Threaded through everything else. Made of

context. In relation to the other and potential selves.

The introduction of the weird, the variant and the virtual brings us in concert with the other. The dynamism of being threaded through the other is a source of creative potential. Of potential transformation. Of perpetually new selves. The transition from virtual to actual a creative act born of difference. Of putting on the other. The combination constituting something new. The self is expanded by encounters with the weird.

According to Erik Hoel's recent hypothesis, dreams introduce a similar weirdness to prevent "overfitting". Akin to the way AI is trained, Hoel suggests "*The hallucinogenic, category-breaking, and fabulist quality of dreams...are there to keep you from becoming too fitted to the model of the world,*" preventing the brain from becoming too entrenched in the "training set" of the familiar (Hoel 1-15). The weirded world of dreams helps to counteract this familiarity. The introduction of the strange making us more able to broaden, adapt and generalize. AI training follows a comparable procedure when weird and chaotic data is intentionally introduced to prevent the AI from becoming overly familiar with a specific data set.

A parallel could be drawn to the Surrealists' use of dreams and absurd imagery. Both are attempts to access the unconscious mind as a way to escape the oppression of logic. Deploying the weird in pursuit of new openings and potentials. So too, the contemporary use of AI generated images breaks free from the constraints of reality, accessing new potentials. A human/data collaboration creating novel connections and morphing, hypnagogic images.

The following voices were written in collaboration with Open AI's GPT-3 chatbot. I use the term "collaboration" critically and in an experimental sense. Current news and debates speculate about the capacity of generative machine learning

technologies such as GPT-3 to write or create images as well as humans do, and the implications thereof. Central to these debates are issues about the nature of creativity, artistic outputs and misinformation. In this section, while recognizing these debates, I approach the issue differently: how can AI be repurposed for exploring new writing potentials and selves? My goal in this experiment is thus not automating the formation of ideas or the outsourcing of writing as a process. Instead, AI is used critically as a sparring tool, namely, in experimenting with (and even obfuscating) the tools' reactions to strange prompts and data. In integrating GPT-3 in the process — rather than outsourcing the process to it — this experiment also converses with other traditions of experimental writing such as those found in early internet art, or even the writings of Dadaists or Surrealists who sought to connect with external agencies (Sanchez-Querubin et al; Rettberg).

My experiment began by inputting a string of non sequitur (weird) phrases related to this introduction, with the goal of reaching potentials that could not be obtained by human or AI independently. The chatbot was then asked to interpret those phrases and use its capacity to output text imitating specific narrative voices to experiment with what I have called in this thesis, verbal drag. As the AI was encouraged to adopt various voices in its narration, the text was dynamically changed. Each voice putting a slightly different spin on the previous text. Inferring somewhat different conclusions. The influence of persona and vast data sets mutating the textual material. It seems that even a chatbot has use for a mask.



Fear of breaking borders is expressed in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* films, where the barrier between dreams and the actual world is porous.



Jess Mac @dissociative_dreams
created with DALL-E AI, 2023



Leonora Carrington, Self-Portrait, 1937-1938

AI Chatbot

Narrate the experience of a lucid dreaming creature Dreaming as a virtual reality Virtual and the actual Deleuze and Guattari lucid dreaming Chagall-like dream scene surrealism escaping a self porosity of outer and inner worlds Nightmare on Elm Street barrier between dreams and the 'real' world broken uncanny dioramas recognising the stranger within virtual reality quantum field theory monsters in my dreams surreal encounters in my dreams morphing images psychedelic The virtual for Massumi, as for Deleuze, is synonymous with potential all memory is virtual holograms eerie 'A dream is not reality but who's to say which is which?' -Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

As a lucid dreaming creature, I am fully aware that I am in a dream. I am able to control and manipulate the dream world, making it feel like a virtual reality. I feel a sense of liberation and freedom as I am able to explore and experience things that may not be possible in the "real" world.

In this dream, I feel like I am in a Chagall-like scene, with surreal elements and morphing images. It feels like I am in a psychedelic state, where the boundaries between outer and inner worlds are porous and fluid. I feel like I am able to escape the limitations of my self and explore new possibilities.

However, at times, the dream can turn into a nightmare, with monsters and eerie, uncanny dioramas appearing. It feels like the barrier between dreams and reality has been broken and I am faced with the strange and unfamiliar. I am confronted with the "stranger within" and am forced to confront and process my fears and anxieties.

Overall, the experience of lucid dreaming is both liberating and unsettling. It allows me to experience a virtual reality that is full of potential and possibility, but also exposes me to the unpredictable and unknown. It is a constantly shifting and evolving landscape that allows for a range of surreal encounters and experiences.

Can you narrate the above in a dopey, paranoid voice?

Sure, I can try to narrate the above in a dopey, paranoid voice. Here goes:

Uh, like, I'm this lucid dreaming creature, you know? And I'm like fully aware that I'm in a dream, and I can like, control it and stuff. It's like this virtual reality thing, man. It's like, totally liberating and free. I can like, do whatever I want and stuff.

But sometimes it gets all surreal and Chagall-like and stuff, you know? And there's like, morphing images and all this crazy stuff happening. It's like, whoa man, it's like a psychedelic trip or something. The boundaries between the outer and inner world are all like, porous and fluid and stuff. It's like, I can escape the limitations of my self and like, explore new possibilities and stuff.

But sometimes it gets all weird and nightmare-like, you know? Like, there's monsters and eerie stuff happening. It's like, the barrier between dreams and reality is all like, broken and stuff. And I'm faced with all this strange and unfamiliar stuff. It's like, whoa man, the "stranger within" is like, totally confronting and stuff.

So, like, overall it's this liberating but unsettling thing, you know? It's like, I can experience this virtual reality that's full of potential and stuff, but it's also like, exposing me to all this unpredictable and unknown

stuff. It's like, constantly shifting and stuff. And there's all these surreal encounters and stuff. Whoa man, it's like, totally trippy.

Thanks! Can you narrate the above in a sophisticated yet terrified voice?

Certainly, here is a sophisticated yet terrified narration of the above:

As a lucid dreaming creature, I am fully cognizant of the fact that I am in a dream. It is as if I am in a virtual reality, in which I have the ability to manipulate and control the dream world. This sense of agency is both exhilarating and disconcerting.

The dreamscape is often surreal, with elements that recall the paintings of Chagall. The images within the dream morph and shift, as if I am in a psychedelic state. The boundaries between the inner and outer worlds become porous, and I feel as though I am able to transcend the limitations of my physical self.

However, the dream can also take a terrifying turn. Eerie, uncanny dioramas appear, and I am faced with monsters and other fearsome beings. It feels as if the barrier between dreams and reality has been irrevocably broken, and I am confronted with the unknown and the unfamiliar.

Overall, the experience of lucid dreaming is both liberating and terrifying. It allows me to experience a virtual reality that is full of potential, but it also exposes me to the unpredictable and the unknown. It is a constantly shifting landscape, in which I encounter a range of surreal and unsettling experiences.

Can you narrate it even more terrified? More paranoid? More unhinged?

Certainly, here is a more terrified, paranoid, and unhinged narration of the above:

Oh my god, I am a lucid dreaming creature and I can't believe what's happening. I am fully aware that I am in a dream, but it feels so real. It's like a virtual reality and I can control it, but it's also like I'm trapped in this never-ending nightmare.

The dream is so surreal and Chagall-like, with morphing images and scenes that don't make any sense. I feel like I'm in some kind of psychedelic state, but it's not fun. The boundaries between the outer and inner worlds are all mixed up and I can't tell what's real and what's not. I feel like I'm losing my mind.

And then the monsters come. They're everywhere and I can't escape them. It's like the barrier between dreams and reality has completely broken down and I'm stuck in this hellish dream world forever. I'm so scared and I don't know what to do.

This whole lucid dreaming thing is ruining my life. I can't tell what's real anymore and I'm having these surreal encounters that are just freaking me out. I feel like I'm losing my grip on reality and I don't know how much longer I can take it. Please, someone wake me up from this nightmare.

Could you narrate in the voice of a benevolent fairy godmother?

Certainly, here is a narration in the voice of a benevolent fairy godmother:

Dear one, as a lucid dreaming creature, you are blessed with the gift of awareness in the dream world. You are able to control and manipulate this virtual reality, discovering new possibilities and experiences that may not be available in the waking world.

Your dream world is a magical place, filled with surreal and fantastical elements. You may encounter Chagall-like scenes, morphing images, and psychedelic experiences as you explore this dreamscape. Remember to embrace the freedom and liberation that this experience offers you.

However, it is important to remember that the dream world can also be a place of fear and uncertainty. If you encounter monsters or other unsettling elements, try to remember that they are not real and that you have the power to change the dream. You are the master of your own reality, even in the dream world.

Trust in your own strength and resilience, dear one. Your dreams are a unique and precious part of your being, and they offer you the opportunity to explore and grow in ways that may not be possible in the waking world. Embrace this gift and all that it has to offer you.



Sin Wai Kin, *It's Always You*, 2021¹⁸

Coda

“We’re not fuckin’ just ourselves, ya know? We’re made of all this other shit too. And that self? That ain’t real, not really.”

“We are creatures of the night, sustained by the blood of others. The illusion of self is but a fleeting thing, for in truth, we are vessels for the immortal thirst that consumes us.”

“Remember that the self is not a fixed and unchanging entity, dear one, but it is constantly evolving and ever-changing. Trust in your potential.”

We are made of things outside the self.
The self does not exist.

Notes

- 1 Referencing researchers recording the physical impact of sound waves using high-speed video: “For example they would play a song and the minuscule movements in the surface of a potato-chip bag would create a visual record of the wave bombardment. Then they used an algorithm that reconstructed the audio from the video, allowing the bag to reproduce the song. In other words, it’s just like you always suspected. Everything is vibrating and everything is listening. Everything is recording and if you have the right equipment you can play it all back.” Anderson, Laurie. *All the Things I Lost in the Flood: Essays on Pictures, Language and Code*, Rizzoli Electa, New York, NY, 2018, p. 207.
- 2 “Part of the difficulty of grasping the voice lies in its peculiar topology, which you describe as a precarious border between the inside and the outside: while the voice emanates from within the body, it is also a part of the world, an uncontrollable outside, a ‘missile’ with its own trajectory. My voice is never simply my own, but there is always, as you note, a ‘minimum of ventriloquism.” Schuster, Aaron. “Everyone Is a Ventriloquist: Mladen Dolar Interviewed by Aaron Schuster.” *Metropolis M*, Apr. 2009, p. 1.
- 3 The below citation speaks to historical speculations regarding La Fornarina, and includes details referred to by voice Untitled #205. Yvin, Jonathan. “La Fornarina Raphael Portrait of a Young Woman Full Analysis.” *Borghese Gallery*, 7 Sept. 2021, <https://visit-borghese-gallery.com/la-fornarina/>.
- 4 “I will try to argue that apart from those two widespread uses of the voice—the voice as the vehicle of meaning; the voice as the source of aesthetic admiration—there

is a third level: an object voice which does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence, but an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation. One shows fidelity to the first by running to attack; one shows fidelity to the second by running to the opera. As for fidelity to the third, one has to turn to psychoanalysis.” Dolar, Mladen. “Che Bella Voce!” *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006, pp. 2–11.

- 5 “Sherman convinces the viewer that her various images are indeed different presence, but that “behind” those there stands no central core of identity.” Krauss, Rosalind E., and Norman Bryson. “House of Wax.” *Cindy Sherman 1975-1993*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, NY, 1993, p. 218.
- 6 “As a person I’m not like, overtly political. I mean I feel like as a person I’m too wishy-washy to really think of myself as this heavy-duty, like, feminist, you know political, you know, person. But um, that’s where I think, you know, it does come out in the work.” Stokes, Mark, director. *Cindy Sherman - Nobody’s Here But Me*. BBC Films, 1994, https://youtu.be/V7K_sb2E0sE. Accessed 2023.
- 7 Referencing Actor Network Theory and Object Oriented Ontology.
- 8 “I guess movies are probably one of my biggest influences, and many of my favorite movies are horror movies.” Stokes, Mark, director. *Cindy Sherman - Nobody’s Here But Me*. BBC Films, 1994, https://youtu.be/V7K_sb2E0sE. Accessed 2023.
- 9 These letters were published for the first time here:

Skal, David J. *Something in the Blood: The Untold Story of Bram Stoker, the Man Who Wrote Dracula*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

10 This passage inspired in part by the following: Sorensen, Joshua. "Queer Coding in 'Bram Stoker's Dracula.'" *Film Daze*, 2021, <https://filmdaze.net/queer-coding-in-bram-stokers-dracula/>. Accessed 2023.

11 The references to Leigh Bowery and Divine are inspired, in part, by the following:

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Fox, Charlie. *This Young Monster*. Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018.

Schwarz, Jeffrey, director. *I Am Divine*. Automat Pictures, 2013.

Yeager, Steve, director. *Divine Trash*. 1998, <https://youtu.be/iYXMeV7XWEM>. Accessed 2023.

Zagarrio, Vito, director. *Divine Waters*. 1985, <https://>

youtu.be/sWzkjYta3bI. Accessed 2023.

- 12 In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire can also become a bat, werewolf or mist.
- 13 Variations on this sentiment have been spoken by Waters on multiple occasions, including here: Jung, E. Alex. "In Conversation: John Waters The Pope of Trash on Anna Wintour, Staying Youthful, and Why Trump Ruined Camp." *Vulture*, 2019, <https://www.vulture.com/2019/06/john-waters-in-conversation.html>. Accessed 2023.
- 14 "Her body of work comprises a compelling and complex archive of selves and objects that are necessarily multiple and perpetually fragmented. Always in between — past and present, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, repressed and expressed, garden and grave, life and art, self and selves, self and other — her photographs do not construct a space beyond the inescapable binaries. Instead, Cahun creates and explores the spaces between them." Manders, Kerry. "Me, Myself and I: Exploring Identity Through Self Portraits." *The New York Times*, <https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/07/21/claude-cahun-homosexuality-i-exploring-identity-through-self-portraits/>. Accessed 2023.
- 15 "Within, stood a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere. " Stoker, Bram, and Roger Luckhurst. *Dracula*. Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 106.
- 16 "I was assigned female at birth and, like the mutant ape, I extricated myself, from that confined 'cage', in order to enter another cage, granted, but at least this time

through my own initiative...Liberty is a tunnel that must be dug by hand. Freedom is a way out. Liberty — like the new name by which you now call me, or the vaguely hirsute face you see before you — is something that is carefully fabricated and exercised.” Preciado, Paul B., and Frank Wynne. *Can the Monster Speak? A Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, London, United Kingdom, 2022, pp. 20–26.

- 17 “Electrons, for example, are inherently chimeras — cross-species cross-kind mixtures — made of virtual configurations/reconfigurings of disparate kinds of beings dispersed across space and time in an undoing of kind, being/becoming, absence/presence, here/there, now/then. So much for natural essence. The electron — a point particle without structure — is a patchwork of kinds sutured together in uncanny configurations. Trying out new appendages made of various particle-antiparticle pairs, producing and absorbing differences of every possible kind in a radical undoing of “kind” as essential difference: its identity is the undoing of identity. Its very nature is unnatural, not given, not fixed, but forever transitioning and transforming itself. Electrons (re)birth themselves in their engagement with all others, not as an act of self-birthing, but in an ongoing re-creating, that is, an un/doing of itself. Electrons are always already untimely. It is not that electrons sometimes engage in such perverse explorations: these experiments in intra-active trans-material performativity are what an electron is.” Barad, Karen. “On Touching: The Alterity Within.” *Studium Generale Rietveld Academie. Hold Me Now – Feel and Touch in an Unreal World*, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, <https://youtu.be/u7LvXswjEBY>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2023.

See also: Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari Félix. “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming

Imperceptible...” *A Thousand Plateaus*, Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minn, 1987, pp. 552–732.

- 18 Sin Wai Kin speaking about their recent film, *It’s Always You*:

“I think a boy band is a really perfect medium to think about how identities are constructed. You have the sexy one, you have the serious one, the playful one and this kind of individualisation of the characters is played up for often marketing purposes, but they can’t exist on their own, and putting them all together in this way is trying to think about the idea of a multiplicity of one body”

Lyrics from the film:

“It’s always you
You’re the one in me
You tell my different sides
My multiplicity
I see my selves in you
Reflected back at me”

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