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ABSTRACT

Masculine normativity has largely dominated and defined the narratives of art history, including access to privileged tools, skills, and aesthetics. This masculine paradigm has structurally embedded an ideology that promotes and normalizes ideals like order, stoicism, logic, and perfection. My art transgresses normative masculinity in order to expand its conceptualization through use of materials, practices, and performances. I select objects, imagery, and performances which are historically tied to personal experiences, aesthetics, and spaces where I have navigated across norms and traditionally accepted boundaries. These objects function as constructed bodies which articulate nonnormative masculine materials and experiences, and form queer networks of material integration and dialectics. By using technology, disparate media, and skills, the material properties communicate with and against each other through signification, assembly, and material agency, to create nonnormative networks charged with gender performativity and queer identity. This queer methodology of rejecting normalization, both hetero and homonormative, fosters radically creative opportunities to play and to build out a narrative history of experiences, objects, images, and texts that reflect a complex identity, fluid across traditionally normative and masculine conceptualizations. The boundaries of masculinity are being transgressed in order to create a new, more fluid and tolerant conceptualization of masculinity.

Asses Rubbing: Expanding Masculinity Through Gendered Material Networks and
Nonnormative Performativity

by

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Thesis
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Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts

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Introduction

The primary aim of my artistic practice is to disrupt, reimagine, and expand masculinity through nonnormative gender performativity and media. Materials, video, and performance are all used to capture the latent history of each and their relationship with the artist in order to expand associated conceptualizations and spaces. I am using a transdisciplinary art practice that originates from personal experiences and reveals non-normative masculinity across public and private spaces through various networked¹ materials. This process creates a dynamic state of gender, sexuality, and material performance² rooted in my own experiences of confusion, trauma, and personal alienation; destabilizing gender norms through reiteration, reconstruction, and hybridity.

I wish to expand and violate the boundaries of normative masculinity and masculine performance and to allow for it to exist in a fluid, non-binary, nonlinear space and materiality. My work vacillates across the normally delineated constructions of masculinity and femininity, building out a space for male identified bodies to perform femininity or nonnormative gender openly. There I can use art as a mode of expression that allows for exploration and discussion of masculinity's aesthetic dominance in art history, as well as its need for queering and inclusion of outside voices and non-normativity. Masculinity has many entanglements and stereotypes that establish borders and frame gender ideals, which allows for a multiplicity of conflicts and invites border crossings and the cultivation of a fluid, nomadic subjectivity³. Masculine performativity

¹ Any combination of materials, including hardware and electronic media, arranged and/or assembled to construct new bodies, laced with previously signified memories and agency, including salvaged Carhartts, scrap metal, or videos. I am using the term materials within the common linguistic legacy, and *not* the philosophy of materialism.

² 'material performativity' describes objects like metal which have contextual and historical associations with men and power, as well as ontological agency as described by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010).

³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 2012

is fertile for queering from its normalized conceptions. Because I believe public and private spaces have already collapsed within each other, I am operating within multiple modes of identity performance⁴, the boundaries of my artistic practice are blurred. The variability of media, objects, spaces, and content also obstruct a clear reading and invite controversy and confusion in order to intentionally broaden the discourse regarding assumptions of gender identity and masculinity. I have purposefully chosen materials that I have a historical relationship with and which fall into the traditional frames of masculine labor and industry, like metal and duck canvas. These materials operate as signifiers from today's social fabric as well as economically accessible materials that I can use and manipulate in order to challenge normative aesthetics and gendered material applications and purposes.

In some ways, these performances and objects are hardwareographic⁵ explorations, in which I am openly depicting a male sexuality which is nonnormative. These depictions often invite readings of obscenity, because of their content, rather than a traditional notion of taste or masculine appropriateness. This more accurately reflects my experiences, as my sexuality is nonnormative and queer. I have experienced and enjoy experiences that most men are not familiar with; I also have experiences that are nonnormative and associated with trauma. I am embedding those experiences into content that challenges conventions and allows for the queering of masculine bodies, pleasure, and spaces through eroticization, allusion, or allegory.

⁴ I use the word performance to blend and include both the theoretical framework of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity outlined in *Gender Trouble* (1999) as well as traditional art performances like Vito Acconci's, in which public and private actions are blurred. My actions may take place inside a white cube, on social media, or inside my own home, so as to blend spaces, how they are documented, and whether I am the subject or object.

⁵ I am using the term hardwareography to describe how these objects and materials reference personal experiences and histories which I am reproducing in new or salvaged/appropriated media and connecting to the wider context of masculinity, gender performance, and art history. These materials may have direct ties to personal narratives or desires. The term is derived from the machinery that makes up a network, as well as a common term to describe blue-collar tools & equipment. I have changed the spelling of *-ware* to *-wear*, to reflect the nature of some of the materials being worn literally, either on my body or the body of the objects I am making.

Practice – a generalized statement of my artistic methodology

As much as I'd like for there to be a standard or normative jumping off point, my ideas float around in my head aging and waiting for materials to request action. I think of queering as a methodology, that I can use to help transform an object or idea into an act of expression which more accurately represents my identity, a potential narrative, and/or hardwareography. How can I communicate something from within, something in which there is limited language for expression? This is why I have always looked towards affective objects or time-based media, because I have found that static or sterile objects are not robust in character enough to incorporate much of my personality, story, and history. I unconsciously find myself attracted to found-objects and pre-existing components. Steel and other metallic materials such as salvaged metal shelving, car parts, unknown metal pieces, brass fasteners, and chrome are usually on the forefront of my attraction, in part because I believe I've been taught to like them as a man, as well as I have my own personal history with them. Many of the materials remind me of exploring my grandparents' barns as a child, exploring the piles of rusty steel parts in dark corners a tool shed, playing dress-up with my mother's old clothes, and maturing into sports culture- wrestling with other boys and men. Now, I am incorporating materials, processes, and imagery that more accurately capture the breadth of my identity, including materials I have suppressed interest in because of fear of social stigmatization. These materials, processes, and imagery may include dresses, lingerie, anaerobic athletic movements, global cinema, or other reappropriated texts. I also believe this aggregation of materials, speaks more eloquently to my cognitive wanderings, attention span, and diverse interests. To me, these materials already have a connection within my head, they already exist within my identity, as a network, speaking to each other within. I also believe these materials are also capable of their own communication and agency, particularly the

materials that have an ability to change color and appearance as they age and move, like metal, movies, or fabric.

Many of the materials I chose, have low socioeconomic contexts behind them. I'm less interested in expensive or raw materials, or processes that have elite traditions within the academy or fabrication industries. I don't shoot movies on film, cast bronze figures, or use expensive oil paints. I find myself drawn to lay or blue-collar materials, salvaged objects, and simple fabrication, that I can acquire, use more cheaply, and learn about online. I am interested in materials that simultaneously depict the impermanent, active, fluid, soft, alive, pleasurable, wasteful, or other abject or sexually charged spaces. I also enjoy the embellishment of objects and materials with a little gloss or luster, and this may include, lace, gold, polished brass, lustrous surfaces, or even "clothing" for non-human objects. Unfortunately, these cost more. I think there is something profound with shininess or gloss, to such a degree in human nature and history so as to cause civilizations to engage in warfare or conflict over lustrous materials like diamonds and gold.

Materials like gold, also have meaning to me because of their literal electric conductivity to networks. I want the materials to be incorporated into bodies rather than included or assembled. These materials are working together cohesively to form a new body, not merely added to an existing one. Bringing something into the body that grows in synchronization or correspondence, rather than alongside. Enable the materials to have a dialogue with one another. I enjoy the little paradoxes I create and find a little queerness in finding a rusty piece of steel and adding a polished brass grommet or gold-plated headphone jack to them.

The materials don't have to actually work, make sense, have utility, or demonstrate precision. In fact, I prefer that they do almost none of the above. Part of masculine expectation is

that everything works, and work well, even to a degree of perfection. I'm not a perfect person, and I have many flaws. And what's more queer than something "unnatural" or "misaligned"? There's pleasure to be found in failure. Because of this, I'm interested in creating art that reflects my many nuances, absurdities, and imperfections. I don't think in linear patterns, and often because of my attention span, find myself wandering off or making illogical cognitive leaps.

Bodies and Objects – how my materials and objects perform together, the concepts behind two recent works of art, and my thesis production

The work "*We all have a Trashcan Within*" was conceived and constructed using salvaged pieces of steel, that I had collected and kept in my studio for over a year. I had been moving the pieces around, suspending them, bending them, cutting them, staring at them, and fastening them together in many impermanent arrangements. I was playing with them and trying to understand the material possibilities. Almost all of the steel pieces were coated in a grey/green paint that had been peeling, flaking, and exposing rust beneath for many years. I collected them from a resale/salvage warehouse in rural central New York. To the previous owner, they were indiscernible parts from a library or hospital, but to me, they were fertile materials, ripe with vitality and livelihood. I saw the stack of scrap metal in the back of the warehouse and I knew I needed them, and I could have them for almost nothing. Most all of the metal pieces I selected were small, "L" shaped pieces in which the cleats seemed to be on backwards. I didn't understand how they were used in a previous life, but they obviously had a specific function. There were also larger pieces, more like a wide, lowercase "n". These seemed like hoods that would be fastened onto something to cover the internal parts or machinery. Part of their latent properties are what drove me to understand them in a potential arrangement. I had

been exploring play, as an open-ended concept, something in which men are denied in adulthood. Play without goals, without utility, without social acceptance. The ability to do something purposeless, and without traditional or normalized “merit”, without goals. Almost all of the metal pieces had something non-normative about them. The cleats seemed to be on backwards, they were too short to be shelves, or they had an extra lip, that prevented them from sliding as a functional element. I thought these materials spoke to me of their potential queerness, particularly because of their naturally masculine associations with metal and industry. Through some of my early studio playdates, I knew several of the pieces would interlock very easily, almost as if they were meant to go together. I allowed this to happen and even facilitated when I could by shearing off superfluous material for a more flush or simpatico connection and bond. I also began considering how they would stay together. I did not want the pieces to be permanently attached. I saw the materials as non-monogamous, or polyamorous and capable of multiple relationships over their lifetime. So, I wanted the pieces to be interchangeable, like a sort of toy blocks in which everything was held together through a series of rods and holes. I made the rods various lengths and thicknesses, and the holes various diameters and locations around the metal. This would allow me to fasten some of the pieces together by sliding a threaded rod through the potentially corresponding holes and using nuts and washers to keep them in place. I embellished the holes with solid brass or gold-plated grommets, to speak to many things, including but not limiting to, luster, endurance, focus, or self-care. I also allowed for “mistakes” to be adopted and repeated. Some of the holes are misaligned, and I felt like this was an important aspect that needed to be retained and replicated. So, I repeated the misaligned holes throughout the assembly process. I also used rivets because of their inconspicuity, but I wanted them to be throwing small signals to people, like eye-contact, that the rivets know why

they were there. Rivets are designed to hide and sit flush against a surface, but these have an outward expression within their color. While the dominant coloring of “*We all have a trashcan within*” is grey, the small pink rivets are actively winking at the audience. I also continued the use of holes, making the surfaces even more adorned and receptive by using ¼” gold plated headphone jacks. These jacks don’t connect to the videos, and have no function, only existing to be penetrated by a curious onlooker with classic stereo headphones.

Over the duration of this piece, I had been thinking of homosocial⁶ spaces. Those places that are deemed toxic to outsiders, but for many men are spaces of comfort and kinship, and spaces of masculine pleasure. These homosocial spaces require a sustained presence of time to fully access, like a childhood playhouse, the locker room, a fraternity house, or prison. It is in those spaces that many men may discover they enjoy men sexually in a way they have not previously understood. Men may engage in their first sexual experience with another man here. The spaces can be violent and misogynistic, but also tender and nurturing. I wanted a piece that contained as much of that as possible. Something that was simultaneously many things at once, whole and broken, strong and soft, outspoken and quiet, violent and nurturing.

That led to the decisions of my final assembly. I knew it should be a large object, but one that was not free, or capable of existing on its own. It had to be suspended to the wall and collapse down onto the floor. I wanted the piece to spill out onto the floor, and become distended, almost in a state of fracturing. This led to the loosely assembled pieces across the ground. In addition to the distended body, I also smashed several of my elements and included them together to depict a sort of concealed or stratification of trauma. I included pieces that I identified as indicators of conformity or markers of normalization. Materials like acrylic or

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

stainless steel that speak to normalized conceptualizations of beauty and aesthetics. Materials that artists, designers, and fabricators often use to indicate wealth and taste. All of those materials I had to buy new and fabricate to mimic the salvaged steel pieces. But I wanted the predominant disposition of this piece to be rusty, old vibrant steel. A new life for old materials, with a wink to code switching and normative assimilation.

This was such a rewarding process to make, because sometimes I don't think I'm ever really free to make, to play, or to explore. That I analyze, scrutinize, and evaluate every. single. decision. ad nauseam. To be able to finally just let go and ignore what might happen in the end. To not look at the end of the road, but to consider what's directly in front of me, only. This is where I really began to find pleasure in my practice. The videos were manifestations of my original thoughts, acting as signifiers that I'm not alone. That there are others out there like me. I knew of examples in cinema of men who were nonnormative, who thrived within homosocial spaces, masochistic practices, and read heteronormative or slightly problematic in today's identity politics. Filmic characters in history, who were, like my object, broken and holding on. I chose the five films because of specific scenes within each. *Cool Hand Luke* has the egg-eating scene, in which one man, is nearly naked, surrounded by clothed voyeuristic men, wagering on the potential accomplishment of a physically impossible feat. They poke, massage, and cajole his handsome body so that he can consume 50 eggs while under male spectatorship. I interlaced this scene with the famous whipping scene from *Lawrence of Arabia* in which the prison guard, who is holding Lawrence down, recognizes that Lawrence may be receiving pleasure from the act of being whipped. The two men hold intense eye-contact for the duration of the abuse. The guard transitions from giddiness in watching the punishment, to discomfort in finding the steely blue eyes of Peter O'Toole answering him. Both of the interlaced film clips also feature blonde-haired

blue-eyed Hollywood icons. The text that was displayed over the clips is a rearranged and modified version of Madonna's Crazy for You. The song features two genderless strangers coming together as lovers in the dark seemed to illustrate perfectly the spark that men can have with the other men while in homosocial spaces or in captivity. The spark a man might feel when his ass rubs against another man's ass, while in a dance club with a woman grinding his hips in front of him, and Madonna or Lady Gaga blasting through the club speakers.

The two films on the large center screen feature more varied constructions of masculinity. *Beau Travail* is a masterpiece of male bodies in the North African desert, training, socializing, fighting, fucking, and domesticating. The selected scenes depict their ritual dances, when they sew and iron their clothes, their shower scenes, and banal homosocial fraternizing. The clips from the other film, *Gerry*, part of Gus van Sant's 'Death Trilogy', features many of the time-lapse landscape scenes in bright pink. The entire film is two men who get lost in a desert but have only each other as they begin the inevitable countdown towards their death from exposure. In the penultimate scene of the film, the men are hallucinating, and Casey Affleck tells Matt Damon "[he's] leaving.", to which Damon languidly rolls over on top of Affleck and with all his remaining energy begins to choke Affleck to death. I was interested in these two films corresponding with each other, again for multiple reasons, but mostly because of the relationships among men in the desert and as they endure hardship together. The way Damon mounts and slowly chokes Affleck, in addition to their intertangling of feet as they struggle together, has many homosexual allusions regarding their relationship.

And lastly, the final screen, featured a film called *Tomboy*, in which the protagonist is a little girl, who identifies as a boy. The film navigates childhood through love, identity, and play. When I originally saw the character in the film, I was struck by how much she looked like I did

as a child. I saw this screen functioning as a sort of self-portrait and oriented the screen to “look” at the other screens on the object. The character is a looped and rotoscoped portrait, in which the trans-boy watches the other men on the screens above, acting out violence and affections towards one another. The title of the piece, “*We all have a trashcan within*” is a quote taken from *Beau Travail*, and I think is quite obvious what I’m referencing in using salvaged materials, homoerotic self-loathing, and repressed traumas.

Dakota Gardens was conceptualized from the spaces where many young boys have their first sexual discoveries with others, both male and female, including the garage or garden shed. In the masculine labor spaces of a garage or garden shed, there is a robust body of language that linguistically codifies misogyny, including calling something weak, a pussy. I have never trained to work on a car, and I know very little about automotive repair. But I know about masculinity’s many connections to the automobile as a signifier of wealth, power, and gender identity. I was fascinated by two automotive repair tools, the engine hoist (aka cherry picker) and mechanic’s cart (aka the creeper) and their linguistic links to masculine dominance and voyeurism over female bodies. I wanted to take these historically aligned masculine tools and materials and somehow transform them into hyper-sexed or oppositely sexed bodies. Is there a space for men to occupy feminine-of-center⁷, within a masculine body? Could I make something feminine-of-center, at all? Almost everything, including gender identity, exists within a patriarchal construct, which denies the presence of a true neutral gender, and reifies masculinity. Even gender non-conforming individuals tend to perform masculinity through fashion choices and other

⁷ This term is used off the presumption that gender exists along a binary spectrum, and a sort of uber-masculinity and uber-femininity constitute the poles, with less repercussions for all identities to perform masculinity. It is because of structural misogyny that femininity is punished, particularly when it doesn’t exist as a normative ideal within a feminine body.

normatively masculine socialized behaviors. When and where can male identified bodies perform femininity without falling into tropes of cross-dressing or theatricality like drag? There are countless spaces in progressive cultures for women to perform masculinity, and pass without judgment or ostracization. For example, all the spaces that women can wear business suits. But there are few, if any spaces for men to perform femininity, without it being construed as threatening, stereotypical, or campy. When a man wears a dress in the United States in 2018, is he cross-dressing? In drag? In spiritual or ethnic garb? What I want, is to be able to wear a dress or perform other behaviors openly, without feeling the weight of misogyny or normative hegemony, from men or women. I want to also challenge misogyny from within a male identified body.

With *Dakota Gardens*, I wanted to build out this space for male identified bodies to perform nonnormative masculinity, openly. I wanted to take these automotive tools' original utility and have them operate in service of something outside of their gendered domain, something native to my identity; an operation that would not normatively be allowed in male signified social spaces, like a garage. I wanted a material or object equivalent to a man wearing a Carhartt dress, doing something openly that would put my body at risk of alienation or assault in public. I wanted these car parts and mechanic's tools, to operate in service of a reversed or transformed capacity. The hoods, rather than functioning as a shield to the heart of the car, would transform into vessels or wombs; folded sheet metal car hoods that now house a young fountain-boy or a crinoline. The creeper, rather than facilitating the male fantasy of objectifying women's bodies or "looking up the skirt of a car", would instead turn into the recipient of the gaze. The bodies of viewers would stand and tower over the creeper, my body the object in the video being

gazed upon, exposed and vulnerable. Yet there would be a required intimacy from the limited range of the screen. People would be forced to engage me, in a close, yet dominant positioning.

I saw the two car hoods as signified objects, the 1997 Pontiac Firebird hood, in black, with sharp angular features, and a larger car, represented the guys I knew in high school who wanted to have muscle cars from their own generation, and retain their status as kings of the high school. The red 2005 Chevy Cobalt hood signified smaller, younger, subdued, round-featured female car, representing blood, and a body capable of nurturing. With these two hoods, the cherry picker was hoisting something far beneath its multi-ton capabilities, a sort of denial of its normative utility; a queered legacy to its original purpose, rather than removing the heart of a car, this picker would delicately hold a water fountain, and allude to a swing or chandelier.

But the hoods had subverted power dynamics, even with the black hood on top, it had two bulges across its chest, like breasts, while shaped like a vessel or skirt. Underneath the Firebird hood/skirt was an orange crinoline and black leggings. The red hood on bottom, but with a single bulge off to one side like an erect cock, and holding a young male body, pleasurably relieving himself into a 1969 Ford Mustang's chrome-plated oil pan. The Mannekin Pis, or the pissing boy fountain at the bottom of the sculpture ties into the long history and the use of a urinating figure in holy, erotic, and queer imagery. The bulges read as both racing stripes and sex organs, simultaneously reinforcing the automotive stereotypes yet very intentionally destabilizing them. The bulges aren't simple racing stripes either, they are hand-sewn upholstery foam and fabric, with furniture piping, sewn through and onto the metal car hoods. The fabric bulges as if applied onto the sheet metal and belie the material properties of the metal hoods, denying unabated masculine readings of the hoods. I also used gold decorative chandelier chain to suspend the Cobalt hood and wrapped them in black fake-leather chain sleeves. The sleeves

read as leggings or garters on the thin ornamental chain. I had the chains fastened to the hoods using brass ‘S’ hooks, continuing my use of brass and gold, for reasons outlined above.

Underneath the ‘97 Firebird hood was an orange plastic netting that I had transformed using a dress pattern found online, and I cut, folded, and zip-tied into a crinoline, as if it were fabric that I could sew. The fabric bulges I chose for the hoods, was cheap, highly gendered fabrics from Jo-Ann’s that I switched the materials to the opposite hoods from which they were gendered. The pink textiles were sewn to the ‘97 Firebird hood using blue reflective paracord. And the blue textile was sewn to the ‘05 Cobalt hood using pink reflective paracord.

The hoods also simultaneously originated out of the concept of the fold, and of an impossible task; a challenge to masculinity. Would it be possible to fold a piece of metal, using only my body, without machine support? How much force could I generate yet control enough to delicately transform these metal car hoods into vessels. I’ve been enthralled by what a fold means, a doubling or forcing the outside inside, an impression of one thought into another⁸. In what better way than to take a masculine object, the car hood (often used by artists and enthusiasts as a gender and socioeconomic signifier) and have it folded into itself, corners crossing, to form a container, womb, or skirt, outside of normalcy. A place of nurturing and watering. Where we can swing, and play, and grow together. To address the challenge of folding the steel with my body, I believed the corner of a room, an often neglected and nonnormative space, was the space I needed. It would provide enough resistance to allow me to manually press the metal into a crease and allow my body weight or strikes to fold the metal. Corners are the confluence of multiple forces in architecture, in this corner: a floor slides under two walls, in which one sharply turns into another, and articulates a boundary of multiple adjacencies. A

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

corner is also a place of hiding, of respite, as well a place of punishment or disregard. How often have we lost something in a corner? Or how long did we spend staring into corners as children. Would I find pleasure in returning to a corner and folding metal into a vessel? I did.

The clothing I selected for the video reflects my variability of interests, and how I switch and perform my normativity and non-normativity from space to space. I wanted to engage in manual labor, wearing garments that reflect normativity and nonnormativity on a male-identified body. From the heels, up to the safety vest and corset, I've worn all of these at one time or another, but never all at once. Some of the items for pleasure, for sport, or work. The chaps and vest reflect various times I've worked on the farm or in construction. The jock-strap, from my time as high-school athlete, yet this time a fashionable Calvin Klein one. Leading to the corset and heels, that I wear at home, when I want to feel beautiful.

One of the critiques of masculinity, is that many of the fashion choices men are provided, are rooted in labor, industry, or utility, not in adornment or to emphasize the body as object. One of my aims is to simultaneously emphasizing the history of the male body with physical labor as well as its potential for adornment and objectification. I thought of feminine empowerment, how women can and do use high-heels, makeup, and other clothing to assert a sort of 3rd wave/girl-power⁹. I wanted to channel that power with my gold heels and white corset. I knew that my heels would be destabilizing when wielding the sledgehammer yet provide significant force when struck directly against the car hoods. I would be in a simultaneously enhanced position of

⁹ The Girl Power movement remains controversial, not only because of its continued sexualization of female bodies, but also because it is dependent on participation in capitalist consumer culture. I have already begun considerations of making my own clothes and shoes to fit my specific needs so as to avoid this paradox and further build out a new material space for my identity. My dresses, including the Carhartt pinafore, are examples of further exploration that give me a sexual self-confidence, without participating in consumer-culture or the reinforced sexualization of women's bodies.

weakness and power. These articles of clothing were selected to reflect this performative dichotomy.

I captured the performance with a video camera. The footage was later edited to reflect the natural timing of getting prepared, as well as in the manipulation of the steel. I'm not interested in a "real-time" depiction of timing in my videos, but I am interested in honesty. I did not edit the speed but kept multiple scenes where the hoods fall over, I become frustrated, pose, or change stances in order to get those ideal folds. Many times, I would strike the hoods, and they would fall on my feet, or I would need to catch them as they fell. I kept those scenes in. I also got creative in how I generated the folds. How I had to bend over, click my heels together, kneel, and press my body against the metal in shaping it. I needed a variety of strikes to help shape each piece. In both hoods, there was a "sweet-spot" of sorts, in which the metal was heated up enough to be malleable, yet not hardened and brittle. During these moments of maximum metal "vulnerability", I enjoyed using my heels to press into the emerging folds of the hood and made them more pronounced. I kept all of these scenes and actions in the video, but condensing them into small, 5-10 second bursts. This made the video fully digestible in under five minutes, without a discernible beginning, middle, or end, and capturing the myriad actions of the performance without video special effects.

Performance – how I am enacting art and gender daily, through objects and gender performativity

I consider my performances to take place daily, inside and outside the studio or a dedicated art place. Some queer acts are documented, others are not. For example, I've resumed shaving my legs like I did when I was a frequent road-cyclist, but this time I'm doing it not

because of sport, and it's being done entirely without any utility. I am doing it exclusively because of pleasure. I enjoy the way my legs look and feel when they are shaved. I love the feeling of a warm summer breeze on my freshly shaven legs or crawling into a warm bed after shaving my legs at night. I have added smaller or revealing clothing, like short-shorts (called *ranger panties*), and tank tops. Much of my fashion choices center around the season and my emotions as I wake up each morning. I am less comfortable in dresses or skirts in the colder months, and many days I wake up anxious, and prefer the comfort and ease of assimilation into jeans and a t-shirt.

I mostly enjoy my dresses around the house or visiting safe spaces, like friend's houses, art shows, or camping. I have been told that my dresses and skirts are not allowed in the university's metal and wood shops because they do not cover my full legs (despite some of the staff being allowed to wear shorts). I also have anxiety about wearing my dresses out in public, knowing the risks involved. I've worn them in downtown Syracuse on multiple occasions, to the grocery store, the hardware store, and the bar. The weather also plays a large role in my clothing selection. I love the feeling of being nearly naked in light dress or skirt when the weather is warm, or hot. I also feel sexy when wearing a dress, in a way that I have never felt wearing a men's suit. Part of my allure in wearing a dress is the erotic charge I feel and reminder of my body. To me, there is a pleasure in having my body nearly exposed or easily accessible like it is in a dress. I love knowing it can just as easily come off as on, as well as a dress conforms to my figure and emphasizes my body. I also enjoy the feeling of wearing undergarments that are normalized for women to wear, like lace briefs, thongs, or a corset (within reasonable restraint- the corset masks my insecurities about my stomach). I've just always wanted to be a sex object, and dresses and lingerie provide me with those feelings.

Athleisure wear has recently emerged as trendy segment of the fashion industry, think Lulu Lemon or Nike's growth. I am drawn to the clothing because of its equal promotion of genders and near gender-identical offerings of garments. The gender-neutral pursuit of versatile athletic wear and comfort feels aligned with my identity and pragmatism. I can dress in non-specific gender clothing and am free to exercise in it, or lounge around and read. Also, because of its elasticity and form fit, I am also reminded of my body in a similar way to a dress and I feel attractive and comfortable in them. I've always found moderate exercise and a healthy diet a vital part of my well-being, so I have the privilege to enjoy an athletic body even when I feel the anxieties of that same body.

My more kinesthetic and dramatic performances are not as routinely or frequently enacted as my fashion and grooming. I have a range of more traditional performances that take place in the studio and usually encapsulate some spectrum of pleasure and pain. The anaerobic activities I make for myself in which I am "folding" steel car hoods with my body and hammers or perforating steel with an axe, I find great pleasure in. Afterward there is an immediate award in viewing the transformed material, and the physical fatigue. I lose weight and my body firms up when I do those for sustained periods of time. There are other performances in which usually involve some act of endurance or self-harm, but these are physically and emotionally taxing for me. I create them because I believe that the acts are important symbols of my identity and self-loathing. Whether I'm trying to drown myself, shaving my genitals with a straight razor, inserting a truck ball-hitch up my anus, crying naked in a bathtub for 15 minutes, fisting a trashcan full of metal shavings, or deep-throating a strap-on; these acts brutalize my body and have left wounds for weeks after. Sometimes they feel urgent, vital, and necessary, other times they feel forced and masochistic. But they almost always communicate something which I do not

understand, a feeling that was *a priori* shared and had remained unspoken. Many times, after these performances people come up to me and tell me one of their own stories or ask for a hug. This is largely why I do them. Because I know that I am not alone, no matter how non-normal or “weird” I am perceived, and I know this is an important conversation to have right now.

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