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Fine Arts Department  
Contemporary Art

Rodion \* Furs

*All the Love in the WORLD*

Master's Thesis

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## Index

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction                                 | <b>4</b>  |
| Theoretical Context                          | <b>6</b>  |
| The Video and the Collage                    | 6         |
| The Performance                              | 7         |
| List of References, Costumes and Characters  | 8         |
| The Other, Fun Context                       | <b>10</b> |
| Identity. Naming                             | 10        |
| Gender, perhaps. What is possible to change? | 10        |
| Ballet. Body. Control                        | 11        |
| Figures. Person vs. Persona                  | 12        |
| Connection, Recognition. Voice               | 14        |
| Jimmy  | 15        |
| There is no you, there is only me            | 17        |
| Collage, again                               | 18        |
| Conclusion                                   | <b>19</b> |
| Kokkuvõtte                                   | <b>20</b> |
| Bibliography                                 | <b>22</b> |
| Literature                                   | 22        |
| Internet                                     | 22        |
| Film   | 23        |
| Appendices                                   | <b>24</b> |
| Appendix 1                                   | 24        |
| Appendix 2                                   | 25        |
| Appendix 3                                   | 26        |
| Appendix 4                                   | 27        |
| Appendix 5                                   | 29        |
| Appendix 6                                   | 30        |
| Artwork Documentation                        | <b>32</b> |

## Introduction

*“A mirror-reflection ... so that I am surrounded by me and my mind surrounds me ... there is no escape.”*

Nancy Holt & Richard Serra’s “Boomerang”, 1974

The leading theme of my work is identity and the search for identity. This essay is accompanying an artwork that is a video collage titled “All the Love in the WORLD”. The video consists of recordings that I made over the past two years; it has different costumes and characters, voices and voicings, attempts to show the self that can and does contradict, but there is one constant: it is “all me”. I decided on the timeframe of two years to keep my work coming from the same mindset, but to also see enough angles on the situation.

I had two goals while making this work. The first one was to examine my own artistic practice, to take a look at what I do—the videos, the dressing up, the performing—and to take it seriously. The second goal came forth during the process of the work and it appeared in the form of a question: “Why do all this?” The question is not concerned with the general creative drive. I do not ask what makes people create art, or what makes them do performance art specifically. I mean a particular scenario of looking at a self, wanting to change the self, adjusting it according to constantly changing criterias, filming the self and rewatching it frame by frame to do it over and over. Not clicking, feeling frustrated, going on—a cycle. Why?

The questions went on and became progressively more personal. “Why do I want to be something else? Can I be something else? Can I be something that I keep liking? Why is it all about me?” Generally I would attempt to separate myself from my art, as I do not want to make it personal just for the sake of being personal. I argue that this piece is something bigger than me digging through my frustrations. I hope to let this digging illustrate, through a personal example, something universal, an ongoing search for connections and better ways to telegraph your intent and personality outwards. Making this work has been an inquiry, an attempt to make sense of the drive to constantly change oneself and be something else.

The main theme is identity, but it is brought forth through the connection of other subjects and practices that I discuss in this work. Naming, persons and personas, relating and imitating, music, loneliness and collage. There is my ballet practice, as both a tool and an influence. There is my guitar, singing, costumes—all means to an end, but just as well things that shaped me in return. I see this project first as a video, fun and interesting, as close as possible to an interaction. Then it is the means and their context: “I want to be a singer, I want to be a rockstar, I want to be a ballerina.” Then comes what I “am” in the eyes of the identity-politics-minded viewer. A transgender man. Doing drag, possibly.

Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie* has been one of the main textual references of this work, and one thing I hoped to carry over from his book is the specific freedom from labels (or, synonymous in this context, their abuse to absurd levels). He speaks of personal and political at once, pitting these categories against each other and showing their direct contradictions. The blending of edges is a reply to the control exhibited and demanded in

contemporary society, from which queer spaces are not exempt. However accepting the setting seems, the medical pathology overrules the personal feelings, leaving a choice of either keeping the gender assigned at birth or having the gender *“that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the state will award me if I behave in the right way.”* (Preciado 2013: 139) Just like Preciado, I do not want any of that. I am a performer first and I cannot deny the existence of gender, but this time I do not have to state my masculinity extra—that I did in my BA. Now I have enough *masc* and enough *fem* and enough general confusion to be content with leaving the gendering for the people.

All of it comes together in the video work and the process of making it, that was for the most part spent looking at myself. It was metaphorical and literal self-reflection, somewhat similar to Nancy Holt and Richard Serra’s video performance “Boomerang” from 1974. In it, Holt is filmed while wearing a headset with a microphone that records her and plays the recording back with a slight delay. She describes her situation, but due to this auditory delay, her speech becomes distorted as she struggles with keeping a hold on her words. Being surrounded by oneself to the point of confusion and inability to see past it is a feeling I relate to this work. In that regard, the amount of “personal” has reached a point at which it stopped being directly personal, stopped being me telling something about myself and became a recording of a person staring at their own reflection.

But all this considered, I wish to stress that it was also about having fun. There was no external forcing to look at myself, most of everything was motivated by the sense of excitement. Dressing up, putting a wig on and experiencing a reaction, sometimes it was just this pure. Involved in this masquerade were people and characters that I genuinely care about. High or low, it is art and I want there to be a place for honesty in liking things that are a little academically “cringe”. There are references to alternative popular culture throughout the entire piece, the important figures are Trent Reznor and Maynard James Keenan. Nine Inch Nails, Tool, A Perfect Circle, Mer de Noms.

## Theoretical Context

### The Video and the Collage

The medium of video work has a history, and within it a history of filming the self. Rosalind Krauss wrote on its implications in *The Aesthetics of Narcissism* (1976), analyzing the video art of the 1970s. She argued that the video could not be appropriately compared to physical art mediums, as its final outcome was a psychological situation rather than an object. The attention in the pieces she discussed was on the performer and their interaction with the medium with them often facing their constantly renewed image. Naturally, narcissism was brought into consideration, but in the end the stress was put on the medium and its promotion of self-reflection. (Krauss 1976: 54–57)

It has now been 46 years since that article was published. After almost half a decade of advertisements, media and technology development, the context surrounding video artworks shifted. New implications appeared with the growing availability of a camera and then that of the Internet. Rosalind Gill has studied the relationship between culture and subjectivity and discussed how self-surveillance became more prominent through the presence of social media in a lecture in 2017. According to Gill filming the self, the same action that was discussed by Krauss, is now much more controlled, significantly closer to surveillance than self-reflection alone, and although the filming in question is not only done by artists, the space in which it exists is shaped by the everyday use of the camera.

In the same lecture Gill discussed a possible generational divide, comparing herself to her students. She spoke of not having the same degree of scrutiny as younger people that she encountered, of them being brought up in a culture where they were used to surveying each other. I think of my work in the context of her words and I cannot help but relate to the issues described. Gill concluded by calling all of this an unprecedented degree of scrutiny of self and others, and with the way certain apps are built around an endless scroll of videos, an unimaginable mass of content, it becomes almost a natural conclusion. Maybe it is the age of the endless feedback loop of filming and watching and evaluating yourself.

Despite the heavy connotations there are positives in the way video is created and presented today and one of them is the accessibility of both making and viewing it. There are still settings in which a more controlled way of work is demanded, but outside of it seemingly everyone can film something. I have considered taking on a more professional approach with filming, looking into a better camera and outside help, but I discarded that idea. My work is often impulse-based and involves trying to catch a certain feeling, and it is crucial to be able to get ready fast to capture the moment and have it be authentic. But more than speed and ease it is about not having to stage something again to make it look better. My cameras managed to capture what I wanted to say and show in a very direct manner. The simplicity of equipment and my approach to editing is related to the same “everyone can film something” principle. I believe it to be realistic and relatable, and it is something I personally enjoy.

My work was created with a collage method. That this term works best when classifying my piece, with collage being defined by the dictionary as a way of creating work by pasting

various and often contrasting materials on a single surface. In my work I am forcing pieces of media and culture together, forcing the written part of my thesis with a video, making the text part of that collage, too. More than that, though, I am forcing all of it upon the single main surface—my self.

I found inspiration for the format in Tiquun's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*. Tiquun was a French-Italian collective that produced several journals concerning varying societal issues among which was a critique of capitalist society. The *Young-Girl* is an umbrella term used to describe a person participating in contemporary society and in doing so, reinforcing its reign. Despite *Young-Girl* not being a gendered concept, it still retains a certain degree of femininity, acknowledging the way objects marketed towards women are presented. (Tiquun 2012: 14).

*“These are materials accumulated by chance encounter, by frequenting and observing Young-Girls: pearls extracted from magazines, expressions gleaned out of order under sometimes dubious circumstances. ... The choice to expose these elements in all their incompleteness, in their contingent original state, in their ordinary excess, knowing that if polished, hollowed out, and given a good trim they might together constitute an altogether presentable doctrine, we have chosen—just this once—trash theory.”* (Tiquun 2012: 21)

The quote above describes the writing process for *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, and I see my own approach echoed there. I would not call my work a trash theory—it is not a theory at all—but it is written in a format in which the misalignments and clashes are embraced. In the later chapters I share outtakes from my diaries, conversations, inspirations and quotes from other authors, letting them come together and show a mindset in which my video was made. Leaving the edges rough, showing the process from the inside makes the work interesting and just a little more intimate, and that is something I aim to preserve. There is no way to interact from a screen that plays a finished video, but in showing humour, both successes and mistakes, I feel like I can get closer to the viewer.

### **The Performance**

As mentioned before, Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* has been an important textual reference for my work. The book, called a *body-essay* by the author, combined social theory and analysis with a personal, bodily approach. The lines have been blurred repeatedly, which made the point clearer: not only is politics dictating the personal limitations, but the limitations, labels, rules and understandings applied to the personal, to the body, are often nonsensical when faced with the reality of life.

Preciado spoke about particular absurdity in relation to gender. Reading out a package insert of Testogel, a drug that is recommended for illnesses related to a deficiency of testosterone, and asking a simple question: *“when and according to what criteria is it possible to affirm that a body is deficient?”* (Preciado 2013: 60) Before that, drawing on Foucault, Judith Butler defined gender as a system of rules, social norms and institutional practices that produced the subject they claimed to represent (Butler 1990: 3). Theoretically I am relating my work to

their texts, but more than that I am recognizing that this subject concerns me directly even outside the academic setting. The performances I put on in my video are of different nature, but the culture that shaped me is still within them. I still exist in a society and think in its terms, which only becomes more layered with the transgender experience.

### **List of References, Costumes and Characters**

The recordings in the video vary, but mostly include me in different costumes and situations. I make out 4 main characters/elements: Choso the narrator, Vorona Dress, Trent Reznor Cosplay and Jimmy. There may be traces of other visuals present, but I consider them secondary. I selected this variety and number of them because I want the video to look fun and interesting and I find costumes fun and interesting.

Choso is a character from a manga titled *Jujutsu Kaisen* written and illustrated by Gege Akutami. My contact with him has been brief and simple. Just as I state in the video, I thought his design was cute and decided to try it on without any extra emotional connections. (Appendix 1)

Vorona Dress is the black dress that I wear throughout the video. It is a costume that I picked up at a theater fair and later tied to a character of mine, Vorona. I have made performances featuring her in the past and those could be called a prototype for the work at hand, as many of them were concerned with embodying a character in order to gain a deeper understanding of them. Although Vorona is not a prominent figure in this work, I want to acknowledge her and that particular self-reference. (Appendix 2)

Trent Reznor Cosplay is the costume based on Trent Reznor's outfits from "Wish" and "March Of The Pigs" music videos. (Appendix 3) Reznor is one of the two main figures I refer to in this work, and will be discussed in the later chapters along with the process of reaching the conclusion to dress as him.

Finally, Jimmy. Like the previous reference this was first a costume. It was based on the outfits of the second main figure, Maynard James Keenan (MJK) during the time of A Perfect Circle's debut album, *Mer de Noms*. For visuals see "Judith" and "3 Libras" music videos. (Appendix 4) However, in the process of the work Jimmy overgrew the label of a costume and became a character of his own.

The idea behind my costumes was not to replicate the original. I picked out elements that I considered central to what I wanted from the character and focused on them. My choices were also influenced by what I could obtain, but I do not consider that a downside. Quite the opposite, I aim to keep some playfulness and stress my own presence in the performance. This experience is not about the characters themselves, but about our interaction and me getting something from them.

In addition to that, included in my video are two recordings from live shows and several screenshots, all of which are sourced in this paper. There are also five songs involved, but none of them appear in their original form. Most are either recited or performed by me, two of

them are actually played, but it is arranged in a purposefully distorted manner, with me either dancing or performing on top of the audio. All of them carry a meaning and a relation to this work, as they were part of the influences that helped me reach the conclusions I did.

The songs are, in the order of appearance:

“March of the Pigs” by Nine Inch Nails, 1994.

“Only” by Nine Inch Nails, 2005.

“Sober” by Tool, 1993.

“3 Libras” by A Perfect Circle, 2000.

“Rose” by A Perfect Circle, 2000.

## The Other, Fun Context

### Identity. Naming

Starting with definitions, my name is xyz.

I started this work by introducing myself, but I did not want to introduce myself as just myself, and so I introduced myself as everything in hopes that would be confusing enough for people to get the memo and drop the subject entirely.

The terrible power of naming and subsequent inability to pick just one name. I call myself Rodion these days and hope to defend my thesis under that name. Still, everything about naming myself feels slightly wrong. The doors are open and the choice is yours, but what comes after? As Oscar Wilde's famous quote went: *"to define is to limit."* To create belonging, but ultimately to limit. That is scary.

What is possible to change? A name. I do not want to have one then.

*"Words change depending upon who speaks them; there is no cure."* (Nelson 2015: 8).

I do not like how some people call me Rodion. It is way too easy to use it as a weapon against me, but I do not have much choice if I want to move on living. It becomes another weak spot, a vulnerability that one just has to learn to live with. Still it hurts some extra, because it is a name I chose myself.

That seems to be a running theme with the transgender experience: assigning a meaning through a name, a title. A diagnosis. Something about constructing understanding, the word coming before the object it describes, overpowering, influencing (directing) the meaning.

*"The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis"* (Halberstam 2018: 4).

I want to have an asterisk after my name. I want to have my name be an asterisk.

### Gender, perhaps. What is possible to change?

I wanted to be something else. It does not sound threatening, it sounds mundane. Maybe socially transitioning is mundane, could be mundane without the pathologization and the idea of only having one chance at it hanging above.

A quote from *Testo Junkie*: *"How can I explain what is happening to me? What can I do about my desire for transformation? What can I do about all the years I defined myself as a feminist? What kind of feminist am I today: a feminist hooked on testosterone, or a transgender body hooked on feminism?"* (Preciado 2013: 22)

Truly, what is there to do about the desire for transformation. Desire is there no matter what you do and it is not the desire, but coming to terms with it that is the trouble. Coping, accepting, then working on plans to justify it to the rest of the world. Learning rules and

theories to defend your case before a court, a committee. Somehow keeping sane while doing that, as if the idea that your existence needs to be justified is yet another part of life.

*“Be that as it may, in order to legally obtain a dose of synthetic testosterone, it is necessary to stop defining yourself as a woman. Even before the effects of the testosterone are apparent in my body, the condition for the possibility of administering the molecule to me is having renounced my female identity. An excellent political tautology.”* (Preciado 2013: 60)

I do not know what it means to be transgender. I have been telling everyone that needed to know that I am transgender, but I do not really know or, more precisely, care if that is a precise definition of who I am. I want to be good. I want to feel good, simple as that.

### **Ballet. Body. Control**

*“If it were not for dreams, there would not be such a thing as ballet—the cruellest of the performing arts—and mothers would smash their daughters’ kneecaps before they had managed even a modest demi-plié.”* (Fraser 1988: 14)

In January 2019 I had my first ever ballet class. I did not have any prior experience with it, but the practice interested me greatly, I wanted to give it a try. I was quite bad at it.

The first time I wrote about the experience happened around August of the same year, that was the initial entry of my “ballet diary”. Simple thing about ballet is that no matter how closely you try to follow the exercise, if you do not have the required muscles, you simply cannot do it. You try and work and wait for them to come one day. Gradually, I got better, and it was with the muscles that the beginnings of my confidence appeared. The first entry was in August, as that was how long it took me to get somewhat used to the practice.

2019/08/19

*“There’s a rule for every little bit of your body, all of them have to be controlled in some way. (Well, start out with at least being aware of them...) So it’s rather ... uneasy even at this level.*

*It’s just one of many things in this constant dialogue between what you want to do and what you actually end up with, so you learn to feel it, understand how your body says things, simply put — how it feels when you do an element correctly.*

*And once you succeed you then have to constantly Remind yourself of doing it like that only, because really, when a body has an easier way to do something, it will choose that. Yeah, there are also the hands, the head, the Music, but you really... you learn to juggle all that. So here I am now. My plies are... (and what is the standard I should compare myself to now?) My pliés are pliés.”*

Coming to ballet I did not think about it helping me construct a different image for myself, but it did that. The choice to start it and the outcome were out of my understanding; these are the things that only make sense in retrospect. Still, with the deeper awareness of the body a new level of surveillance appeared. I am now looking at ballet as a means of shaping, physically and mentally.

2019/11/01

*“ballet to me feels a very physically invasive discipline, not onto the other, but onto one’s own body. there’s the expected “ah i hold my back straight” way, the habit of ingraining elements into whatever you do, involuntarily, but it’s also the inability to actually let go of the rules when doing something... anything different.*

*i went throwing axes. yeah, i missed. i was explained the technique and i was legit trying to follow through, but AUTOMATICALLY, above all else, my body felt the need to preserve the pose. back straight, shoulders down, not bending the lower back, the head is lifted, legs absolutely straight. even my arms were like: “ok let’s just pretend that’s another position. kinda like the third!”*

I think I wanted to be something else. I had other kinds of deformation in mind when I came to ballet, practices of starvation, but I decided to try to keep myself as much as I could. Ballet, as so many other fields of sports at the end of the day, is all about self-discipline, self-control. Self-mutilation. It is a difficult relationship: the use and abuse, the pretty images, the objectification, the never-enough, all of it getting internalized. *“You have to deform your body, learn to deform it and grow comfortable within this deformation.”*

There is a joy in it. With putting your comfort aside and prioritizing the pose comes a sense of control. It seems to be an achievable goal, one thing you can actually control. But those are also tricks of restriction. You do it for the pose, all of it for the pose. But then, the pose might not benefit anyone.

You do it... For others? Not the others, for the way you want others to see you.

### **Figures. Person vs Persona**

I wanted to be like someone else. The notion of a character, or wearing a character. Trent Reznor. Why him, why MJK. What for.

Something like having posters of musicians on the walls of a teenager’s bedroom. But not really. I am 24 years old, I never really hung posters outside of my closet. Maybe it is a hint that I should have.

I have been listening to Nine Inch Nails for years, but I only fell into this focus this year. It got serious with and through recognition.

2021/05/02

*“i’m emotional over connections and i’m inspired but it’s only for tonight but i’m also in love and maybe a bit happier to be like i am bcs there is this level of understanding. it feels possible? to verbalize the complex feelings that plague. it’s possible. he does that and in such a down-to-earth way that i recognize and aim for with my words as well and it’s just inspiring but more than that HOPEFUL because it’s some sort of recognition.”*

I started picking it apart then, trying to understand where the love goes, comes from. His work was inspiring to me in its themes, approach, execution, but it was his image that ended up being an outlet for me. This is where the distinction between a person and a persona came into my work. I saw the artist and had my opinions on him, but in the end, it is not like I knew the man personally. I did not, I do not and there is no need to concern myself with that, since it is my own feelings that I built my work on. Public people have their own personas and in this case, as well as MJK's, that is all I get to see.

So I took what I wanted and ran with it. Masculinity/image/style/looks, something of how I want to be perceived, or something that speaks to me. Before I had this deep-dive into NIN I spoke with a friend about how I would hate to live an image this destructive:

2021/02/17

*"it feels to me like the more open this dirt and obscenity becomes, the more... difficult it is to do anything "positive" about it. u can b disgusting and that might b sexy for a while but it will most likely not end in any satisfying way*

*the line i was drawing above with the obscenity talk... it was about BEING one of them. like Trent is/was. it sucks bcs there's not really any escape in that situation. it's good that you have a character that you can live out this pain through and i think it's better than letting YOURSELF become the character. even if that might feel more appealing (it does to me). it's better bcs as i said there would be little escape otherwise"*

And I think I still would hate it, but some part, some part of it is very familiar, something that is already present.

2021/05/19

*"i found something that spoke to me v directly and here we are. i plan on doing a look inspired by 90s trent for my next makeup video. i wrote abt him in my work diary for my thesis. if i manage to get him right, get myself right and believe myself to succeed in all that edge appeal and god MASCULINITY and if i manage in the process not to oversexualize myself to the point of self harm. then. i will ascend and it shall also be my thesis. hell !"*

2021/05/20

*"I think I might try to make myself into someone I want to be and, here's the catch, try to believe that I succeeded. Make a pretty-handsome-dramatically-painful-reznorish persona, hold it and receive a confirmation that I can be and am all these things, dramatic and painful and just as edgy as my soul desires. Maybe then I could dance something happy."*

That passage is me recognizing this as a pattern, a ritual that I have been going through before. Finding an image, feeling close to the image, wanting to get closer still to the image, becoming the image. This is me trying, yet again, to construct a persona for myself.

This time however I have the tools of a more passing body. So that if I were to "make myself into a guy" I might actually succeed. Maybe suddenly feel that it is not a performance and I am allowed to be who I want to be.

2021/08/01

*“On the 31st of July I went to a drag show for research. I think I fit on a stage. I think what I do resembles the drag shows I saw. In form or more... or less. What NIN song would I use for a show?”*

### **Connection, Recognition. Voice**

*“And it’s in that connection, in that maybe I can do it...”*

My relationship to NIN changed at one point—I got more involved—and the change in attitude came through recognition. By recognition I mean a connection that I found with the source material, or an experience of relating to it. With Trent Reznor it was largely in the topics he handled and the way he worded them, I felt something common with my own work. There were other cases though. Present in my work are also references to Maynard James Keenan, with whom I first connected through recognizing a voice.

For the past several years I have been learning classical guitar. Even before that I have been singing. Just like ballet, these were not interests that got focused on most, that spot was reserved for the general space of “art”. Still, I participated in several choirs, got a lovely taste of singing and then continued that practice on my own. Then with the guitar. Then my second puberty hit.

2021/06/07

*“i loved that performance (Tool Sober Live 1993, link in bibliography) so much in part because i felt like i myself had a somewhat similar timbre. i can’t tell how i sound right now, i’m not yet... stable in my voice feel/understanding, but i also think it’s... not gone so easily. what i want to bring out as familiar is the chorus, the way he goes at it from “mother mary” it’s definitely the technique, the deep reach to take out that clear note and make it DEEP, but i think it’s still down to timbre.*

*i’ve been thinking of timbre and it’s such a difficult thing to define bcs it’s something that just is there, adds to the package. i’ve been thinking how i have something completely different from trent for example, but that thing maynard did, and i mean this full and high sound with the slight waver... this thing. this thing i know and feel, it feels like trapping sound within your chest and holding it there, it feels like throwing up sometimes, but it’s so recognizable? and it’s so demanding. not shallow, not JUST piercing but... really having a weight to it.”*

There was obviously more to that performance than a beautiful vocal work. The song was grabbing on its own, and without the musical accompaniment from the rest of the band the vocals alone might not have had the same effect on me. Still, they were what I chose to focus on.

*“i’m focusing only on that one vocal moment. and i suppose i’m doing that bcs... it feels good. it feels nice to recognize it and it feels so nice to maybe... idk feel like “oh i can try this out, i can make them listen like that too”*

I sang this song many times over the course of the summer, first with the original recording on the background, then on my own, or with the guitar. None of this was done to later be published. Like the rest of my performances I did it because I found joy in it. So I sang, recorded and listened. Remembered at some point that my voice was going through puberty and should probably be handled with more care. Managed to scream that song from a hilltop before remembering.

I would say it was another attempt at connection and reflection: I wondered what it would feel like to actually perform the song outside of the relative safety of my home. Then came a thought process through which I decided to be one of *"the men that go crazy onstage"*, found a hill near an industrial zone, a place that I most probably did not have permission to be in, put on my trusty bright wig, made myself a beacon and started vocalizing. It was pure stage terror.

2021/08/20

*"i wanted to do the hill bcs i wanted to try performing solo on a stage. i think it worked really well as a stage. it was pretty terrifying"*

*i wanted to figure out whether i could sing loud enough for the cam to catch. was surprised to find how much it picked in the end... i like the picture it paints. and i even like how some places sound. i also like that in that video i move around and it's... so similar to what maynard does sometimes, some bits rly remind me of his sober live. it's so funny but i feel like i Understood something thru tht experience"*

Finally, a full circle:

*"i love how maynard sings the "mother mary"s and i had a whole point abt recognizing something in that that motivated me to learn this song these months ago. which i like but also find funny bcs out of context. why am i singing abt sobriety on a hill, trash can, home"*

Really, why am I.

## Jimmy

2021/11/20

*"anyway i talked with one girl and somehow along the line i showed her my last post. she was like "wait THAT'S YOU??" and i was like Yeah! (proudly) n she was like "oh it looks like a very hot girl!"*

In the last months of working on this project I developed a character that was called Jimmy. Initially he was supposed to be a costume only, inspired by Maynard James Keenan in his *Mer de Noms* era, similar in format with the Trent Reznor Cosplay. Before I decided on the format of performance for Jimmy, I tried several different approaches. First I sang, and I did not stop at "Sober". I found a new focal point in the song "3 Libras" in which MJK also did the vocals. The song combined with the music video for it left an impression on me, which was a starting point for the creation of the character.

After learning the song and singing it myself, I started looking at the piece from other angles. Paying closer attention to the visual, I painted the moment that spoke to me the most. (Appendix 5) I tried to find what it was that I was drawn to, and it all seemed to come together at that scene.

Letting the idea sit for a time I worked on the rest of the project, but not before ordering myself a new wig. A new visual was coming together: a mesh shirt, rings, makeup, long brown hair. All these feelings and associations kept layering until I decided to finally try on the costume, which I did for the first time in October 2021. After trying him on several more times, I realized that he was no longer a copy or an image of inspiration only: he was embodying a distinct set of feelings. Jimmy has grown to be something feminine while masculine, something specifically free, hot, self-destructive but self-preserving (surviving). A hot girl, as much as MJK was one. A hot girl *“doing hot girl shit”*. (Appendix 6)

2021/11/20

*“i think this was precisely what i needed AND from a stranger... i rly don't know how that clicked into place but really it's... interesting. guess it's kinda like drag, when u can separate yourself enough when u need to but... she said that hot girl comment and i was ecstatic and only later i realized that hey, that didn't feel like being misgendered or anything close to it. even though technically...”*

It is something else, I believe. I have spoken to several transmasculine people that I am friends with and it came up with surprising regularity, how for several of them after a period of time of taking hormones, something feminine started creeping back in. A direct quote from one of them:

2021/11/25

*“yah i love it, tbh i dont always see it as me dressing up as a girl but it's how ppl perceive me and it's nice to be able to wear a dress and speak and have a low voice where people are confused. idk why it's satisfying but i think it's because it's the control i have over my own appearance ... i thought i was maybe not like 100 percent a man but no it's literally nothing about that, it's about control and being able to experience gender and sex in however way i please versus how it's been forced on me from birth”*

Jimmy is a look and pattern of behavior, a certain approach to human interaction, some liberation, some clubbing that I do not really participate in, something dirty and something hot. Something I am trying to understand and put on.

It also corresponds with an image of a hot girl in my head. In fact, I looked up “hot girl” through several search engines to see how off mark I was. I found nothing similar. “Cool girl” was closer, but... It is interesting to think, where does my Hot Girl exist? Because the search results were not of her, nor for her. Maybe it is more about who sexualizes Whatever Girl and what the purpose of it is, than her. Perhaps my Hot Girl is closer to the kind that dies in horror movies because she has sex, as opposed to the final girl that makes it out (Nicolaou 2018). Perhaps she is hot because that is what happens to her.

Perhaps not. My Hot Girl practices involve less death and less reckless sexual behavior, and mostly consist of dancing. Alone. At home. I am not going clubbing, especially now. But I make do. I dance to *Mer de Noms* in something leather and goth and ballet and platform boots. Is this sexualization better than ones I had in previous years? Where I had no masculinity to back me up? Where it was all simply a slow-pretty death? Sure hope so.

2021/11/25

*"i'm still doing weird things with my understanding of self and that's that i spose. one of the videos i shot wasn't meant for this but. i kinda looked at it outside of its original context and decided why not. why not objectify myself a little.*

*and it's been an interesting experience. bcs i'm at a point in my transition where i pass and i'm becoming this. hairy balding dude and suddenly it's like. the perfect ground to go to the feminine side. bcs before there was too much femininity. so i played with those pics and tried to pass as a girl. or a maynard. but no yeah it's something mixed. love them tho"*

Actually, at least for now, I really think so.

### **There is no you, there is only me**

The title of this chapter is a line from the song "Only" by Nine Inch Nails that I quote throughout the video. Before "Sober" it was this song that haunted my days. It is a good example of lyrics that I recognized myself in, which in turn made me want to learn it. I tried to sing it, overlay the recordings, make it make sense, all of which resulted in several folders worth of material and the intonations of the song ingrained into my brain.

It has now been enough time since I first heard it. I can see it from a distance and I find it an ironic fit for my entire work. The lyrics go:

*"I'm becoming less defined / As days go by / Fading away / And well you might say / I'm losing focus / Kind of drifting into the abstract / In terms of how I see myself / Sometimes I think I can see right through myself / Sometimes I think I can see right through myself / Sometimes I can see right through myself"*

The song then goes on to several lines of thought, one of them being the presence—or absence—of the other:

*"I think maybe it's because / Because you were never really real / To begin with / I just made you up / To hurt myself ... And it worked"*

With the conclusion being reached at the chorus: "*There is no you / There is only me.*" Only, only.

What is interesting about all these figures and my work with them is that in the end, I do not know how much I should even mention them. The work itself is not about them. More than

that, they are not even here. I never met these people. I saw them through a window or a screen. I saw pictures and heard sounds, and I felt people, but it was only me.

The lack of the other behind the image is a constant. With every new action comes a reminder that it is just you and you and your screens and your frustrations.

2021/05/25

*“you see i’m tying myself to the acceptance phase of “there is no you, there is only me” but the thing is. it’s screamed but it’s tentative, it’s still a hope, an expectation that a you was or COULD’VE been there. while there really is no you. and i can be angry and saying there is no you but so WHAT! I’M STILL MISERABLE!”*

Only!

### **Collage, again**

I have spoken of loneliness and frustration and imitation and whatnot, but I feel now is the time to stress: the main feeling of this work is joy. Whatever I did, I did because I wanted to and because that also made me happy. So maybe I wanted to be like someone else, or maybe I wanted to love myself like an image of someone else, or I wanted there to be a someone else; I do not know. What I know for sure is that I moved and I had a good time. What did I say in my gender passage? *“I want to be good. I want to feel good.”* That is all.

Self-discovery can come with some dreary side-effects, but I believe the joy of finding yourself is worth them. As for the characters and personas, it is about picking pieces from them. Making up a self, being a collage. Imitating the figures but not fully, letting some errors/personal decisions come in the mix. Trying to discover a connection instead of planning it ahead. Becoming a mix of their image and some “you” that is present and unavoidable. Moving on from the experience with a new piece stuck to your self-collage.

In the long run, it was the unavoidable “you” that surprised me the most. Everything I picked and stuck to the screen was special to me, and a little bit impossible. I would later introduce people to those visuals in hopes of them also seeing my pickings as special, but mostly they just saw me. Undoubtedly that was a win in itself, since they cared enough to look and search, but it was a turn for me: they saw all my stickers and references as extensions of me. Not a Trent-Reznor-lookalike, but me the Rodion in a costume of that one famous guy, whatever he was. They saw me with them in the background, not the other way around. Not the way I was used to looking.

As time went on I moved away from certain images, let them fade, but my self stayed, as did the technique of the collage. What I am documenting in this work is a coming into rights of a life, your own life. Gender, personality, hair color, whatever, all of it: it is about finding what you like, what clicks with you and what you feel you want to be. Maybe what you already are, what you only need to allow yourself to admit to. That and others recognizing this you in you. That is it. That is the joy!

## Conclusion

This work is an attempt to capture the search for identity and document the way new pieces are added into one's self. Using myself as an example has been a deliberate choice, since that particular practice of "self-collage" is something I noticed within my way of work and wished to study. But it is not about me either, or it is not meant to be. It is not concerned with what I am, personally, but with how I become what I am, how people accomplish that in general. It is awfully difficult to tell what is a universal experience, but that is why I see my work as a part of a bigger conversation.

Examining my artistic practice and the topics around it, I found connections with the works of other people. Preciado's way of speaking boldly about both personal and public matters, his method of connecting all of it to his gender experience. The simple and efficient questioning of "Boomerang", concerned with how much self-reflection one can take before everything starts losing meaning. A number of alternative metal musicians who I simply liked and took along for the ride. My friends and people who would listen to me conceptualizing my thoughts via direct messages. All of them shaped this work, and this work shaped me. Maybe the other way around too.

The theme of identity is addressed through other subjects and practices I partake in, some more direct than others. There is naming, labeling and gender, the very loaded daily kind of performance that Butler speaks about. There is the afterimage of gender as I transition. There are no planned references to the changes I go through, physical or mental, but that is not to say that there are no references at all. There are the unplanned ones. Little things that I do not see or control, things that come simply with being a part of society. Whatever I cannot tell apart now, whatever now is just my normal. I keep them in, and I want to, in enough time, see them.

Then there are the more obvious ways of performing. There is ballet, my experience with which was both a tool and an influence. My guitar and singing practice that I am still trying to come to terms with: should I see myself as an artist performing with voice and guitar, or a musician? Should I aim to be the latter? Or is it just labels, same as it was with ballet and wanting to be a ballerina? I wanted to be a ballerina. And a rockstar. And an asterisk.

The video is a little love letter to the world. With different characters, costumes, sounds and messages, it is as far as I can get in the land between images and real human interaction. Not as a professional in any of the fields I cover, not distanced by a 4K camera. And truly, I hope it is a comfort. That you really do not have to be a pro to do any of it. So here's to trying, and a hello from the other side of the screen.

## Kokkuvõtte

Minu töö läbivaks teemaks on identiteet ja selle loomine. Töö koosneb esseest ja videoteoset nimega "All the Love in the WORLD". Video on tehtud kollaažitehnikas, kus vahelduvad erinevad kostüümid, tegelased, viited ja muu materjal, aga kõik on ühendatud läbi mu enda. Lihtsalt öeldes on see "kõik mina". Ma kasutasin teoses oma viimase kahe aasta jooksul tehtud *performance*'eid. Otsustasin kollaažis kasutada materjali sellest ajaperioodist, et säilitada mõtteviisi terviklikkust, aga samuti selleks, et näha kuidas algne mõte aja jooksul arenes.

Töö tegemisel oli mul kaks eesmärki. Esimene oli uurida oma kunstipraktikat, mis põhines tegelaste loomise, tantsu, muusika ja esinemise kombineerimisel. Mõte oli vaadata enda varasemaid teoseid ning luua terviklik arusaam sellest, mida ma teen ning miks ma teen seda just nii. Teine eesmärk kujunes välja töö käigus: vastata küsimusele, miks ma seda kõike üldse teen. See küsimus oli suunatud mustriks, mida ma enda loomingus märkasin. Enda vaatlemine, soov ennast muuta, millele järgneb uue visuaalse kriteeriumi loomine. Selle testimine, filmimine, kaadri kaupa läbivaatamine. Mind huvitas, kust tuli pidev soov ennast muuta, ning miks see ei saanud kunagi rahuldatud.

*Kas ma saan olla midagi muud? Kas ma saan olla midagi, mis mulle meeldib ka edaspidi? Miks see kõik minust on?* — See töö on ülesehitatud isiklikule kogemusele, aga tegemist ei ole otseselt minuga. Ei ole nii tähtis, kes mina olen, vaid see, kuidas minust saab see, kes ma olen. Kuidas inimene üldiselt muutub. On raske öelda, mis on universaalne kogemus, kas teised inimesed näevad ennast samuti kollaažina, aga selles ma näen enda töö lisaväärtust. See on osa suuremast arutelust.

Ma käsitlen identiteedi teemat läbi erinevate praktikate ja kogemuste, mida dekonstrueerin selles essees. Tegemist on nimetamise ja sooga, isiksuse ja tegelaskuju eripäradega, jäljendamise ja kollaažiga. Siia on kaasatud mu balleti kogemus, mida olen kasutanud vahendina, aga mis on mind oluliselt endaga suhtluses mõjutanud. Juttu on minu kogemusest kitarriga, laulmisega, kostüümidega. Kõik need tegevused on jätnud jälje ning aitasid mul kujuneda just nii.

Paul B. Preciado raamat "Testo Junkie" (2012) on olnud selle teose üks peamisi tekstilisi allikaid. Oma raamatus räägib Preciado isiklikust ja poliitilisest, uurides kuidas need kategooriad üksteisega suhestuvad ning kui tihti on nad vastuolus. Tänapäeva ühiskonnas on kontroll pidev ning Preciado raamatu stiil ja otsus jätta sisse elu mõlemad aspektid on reaktsioon ja vastupanu sellele kontrollitusele. Olles ise transsooline mees, suhestusin tema viisiga olla vaba sildistamisest. Ma olen ennekõike esineja ja ma ei saa eitada soo olemasolu, kuid seekord ei pea ma eraldi midagi tõestama. Seda oli vaja mu bakalaureuseõppes. Nüüd on mul piisavalt maskuliinset ja feminiinset ja üldist segadust. Saan lihtsalt olla.

Töö tegemise protsessis lindistasin ma uusi videosi, vaatasin üle vanu, panin asju kokku — ehk vaatasin ennast pidevalt. See kogemus meenutas mulle Nancy Holti ja Richard Serra 1974. aasta *performance*'it "Boomerang". Selles filmitakse Holti ja lindistatakse eraldi tema

kõnet. Tal on peas kõrvaklapid, mille kaudu mängitakse talle tema sõnad tagasi väikese viivitusega, mis tekitab temas raskusi enda mõtete sõnastamisel. Holt kirjeldab oma olukorda ning moonutatud viisil ütleb, et ta on peegelduses kinni. Ta ütleb: "Mu mõistus ümbritseb mind ning väljapääsu pole." Mul on tööprotsessis tekkinud sarnaseid tundeid, mis tekitasid omaette huvi. Nagu oleks isikliku hulk jõudnud punkti, kus see ei olnud enam otseselt isiklik, ei ole kellegi endast, vaid sellest kuidas ta jääb kinni enda peegelpilti.

Kuid lõpetuseks ma tahan rõhutada, et vaatamata kõigele oli tööprotsess lõbus. Selle maskeraadiga olid seotud tegelased, kellest ma olin siiralt huvitatud ning kellele ma viitan läbi terve teose. Olulised nimed on Trent Reznor ja Maynard James Keenan. Samuti minu sõbrad ja inimesed, kellega rääkides olen oma mõteteni jõudnud. Kõik see mõjutas tööprotsessi ja mind. Kogemusest sai segu inimestest, visuaalidest, mõtetest, "sinadest" ning kõik see lisandus taas mu enda minakollaaži külge.

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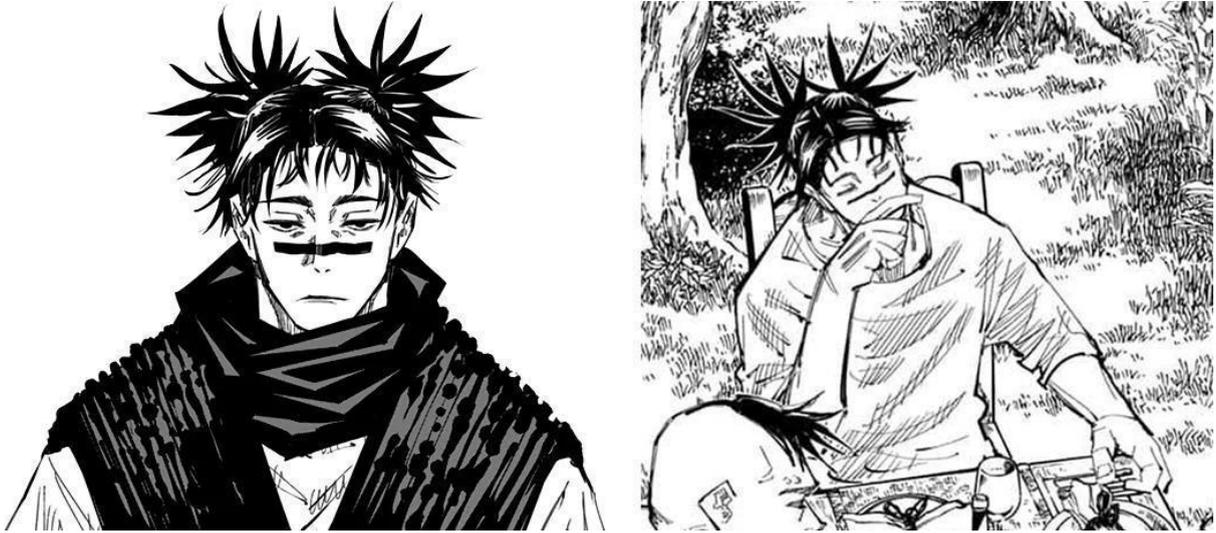
### **Video**

Nancy Holt and Richard Serra, *Boomerang*, 1974. Film, 10 min.

Nine Inch Nails, *Closure*, 1997. Film, 91m

## Appendices

### Appendix 1



Choso, screenshots of *Jujutsu Kaisen* manga panels



An edit of myself in costume

## Appendix 2



Drawings of Vorona and the dress



Vorona Dress in action. Screenshots of a performance

Appendix 3



Screenshots of Nine Inch Nails' music video "Wish" (left) and "March Of The Pigs" (right)

Appendix 4



Screenshots of A Perfect Circle's music video "Judith"



Screenshots of A Perfect Circle's music video "3 Libras"

## Appendix 5



A screenshot of A Perfect Circle's music video "3 Libras"



A painting I made based on a screenshot of A Perfect Circle's music video "3 Libras"

Appendix 6



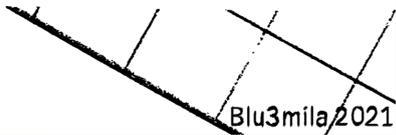
Jimmy collage



Screenshots of one of Jimmy performances. The Hot Girl in question

Artwork Documentation

yes.



Blu3mila/2021

An approximate method of work, illustrated. Self-portrait with Trent Reznor



Screenshots of the video "All the Love in the WORLD", 2022. 9 min



Screenshots of the video "All the Love in the WORLD", 2022. 9 min