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KATRĪNA DŪKA

FEMME QUEENS AND GENDER GLITCHES:

PERFORMING THE TECHNOLOGY
OF BECOMING-MONSTER



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**FEMME QUEENS
AND GENDER GLITCHES:**

**PERFORMING THE TECHNOLOGY
OF BECOMING-MONSTER**

KATRĪNA DŪKA
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Katrīna Dūka to Master Performance Practices, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in Performance Practices, 2022.

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PRACTICES**

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SYNOPSIS

FEMME QUEENS AND GENDER GLITCHES: PERFORMING THE TECHNOLOGY OF BECOMING-MONSTER is a practice-led research situated in the intersection of Feminist Theatre Practices, Gender Studies, Feminist New Materialism, Posthumanist Feminist Theory and Monster Studies. Through transposing the notion of glitch from digital technologies to gender technologies, I adopt a femme drag practice in order to create a methodology for performing a deviant and monstrous femininity that aims to shift narratives of womanhood. This research derives from the observation that much feminist theatre practices employ critical mimicry, irony, and grotesque as a strategy for deviation, which, I argue, reinscribe the idea of an inherent abjection of feminine bodies. Therefore, I take an approach that is engaged in creating excess meaning rather than an aesthetics of excess. Through embracing the notion of monster as a disrupting, yet world-making figuration, I engage in speculative fabulation to create a solo drag performance *The Ghost of Me*. Drawing from the process of making this performance work, I propose principles for thinking and doing femininity on stage that are based on body glitch, identity glitch, and narrative glitch, as well as through an ethics of vulnerability.

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DECLARATION

I, Katrīna Dūka, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, 'FEMME QUEENS AND GENDER GLITCHES: PERFORMING THE TECHNOLOGY OF BECOMING-MONSTER'.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

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INTRODUCTION

"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories (Haraway, 2016: 12)."

The first time I jokingly announced that I am a drag queen trapped in a woman's body, I had no idea that a few years later I would be competing for a crown in a drag show for... drag kings. That year I was still fully convinced that for an AFAB¹ woman becoming a drag queen is impossible. I did not win the crown, and perhaps it was the moment of receiving a badge for third place that made me start questioning why in the community I was part of and in much of contemporary queer and feminist theory, the premise of drag as a gender play lays in the assumption that it is a swap between the sex of a body and its gender performance. In other words, the general understanding of drag is that it is male femininity embodied by the drag queen or female masculinity embodied by the drag king. It was not until I tried on a hyperfeminine persona to understand the social and political powers that AFAB women performing as drag queens (femme queens in particular) hold in disrupting normative femininity on theatre stages and in artistic academic discourse.

¹ The term AFAB is used to refer to a person's biological sex and it stands for assigned female at birth.

In this research, I sometimes use the term woman to refer to people who identify as women regardless of their assigned sex or gender at birth and people who have faced the assumptions, expectations and limitations placed on women in Western society. More often, I use the term femininity to refer to attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with-, but not limited to-, women. However, the subject of this research is the femme queen, which is a type of hyperfeminized drag queen performed by a queer AFAB woman, and more precisely, the unnamed persona (who I will name Femme Queen only for the time she exists in this written thesis) I became for the performance *The Ghost of Me* (2022) as part of this Master's research project. Although the starting position of this research project is limited to my own body that has its own bound experience with identifying mostly with femininity, I try to remain inclusive to other bodies and their experiences throughout this research process by addressing possible points of meeting.

I do not consider gender as a natural attribute to a body, nor do I believe that gender identity has an original. I look at gender as being constituted by copying copies of what has been ideologically and historically produced as gender. Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler suggests that there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender at all (Butler, 1999: 25), hence gender being performative. The performativity of gender has been

linked to drag performances as an example of gender subversion, however, drag as an art form in itself is not inherently subversive. I also consider gender as prosthetic. As writer and philosopher Paul B. Preciado (2018) explains, bodies have been shaped and moulded to fit in visual and material categories of normative gender. Drag practices are concerned not only with the performativity of gender, but also with the prostheticity of it, which manifests in the ways the drag performer's body is visually altered and enhanced to fit a quotidian (but sometimes also a creature, monster, or fantasy) gender. But ultimately, I consider gender as technological. Essentially, I take a posthumanist and feminist new materialist approach to think about gender in terms of discourse and performativity, but also in terms of the material effects that the notion of gender has on a body when gender as a set of technologies is applied to it. Gender, as any other human-made technology, is inherently flawed and broken, therefore, I find possibilities to subvert, disrupt, and break normative gender through technological disruptions. One such disruption that I propose in this research is glitch² which I transpose from digital technologies to performance practices, where it becomes a metaphor and a dramaturgical vehicle for becoming - a woman, a monster, a drag queen, a story, - on stage and beyond.

² Glitch is mostly seen as a disruptive force, however, I see glitch also as a world- and meaning- making force. To take inspiration from glitch, I will make intentional disruptions in the flow of the main text by adding footnotes that might shift the way this thesis is read.

The monster³ and the monstrous, and the assumed inherent monstrosity of women, is another important theoretical notion in this research. Historically, women have been portrayed as monsters (whether through theorizing women's bodies as abject or deeming women's bodies inhuman), and monsters have been gendered as women (from ancient myths and folktales to sexy vampires and cyborgs in popular culture). As some feminist scholars have argued, the monstrous figure not only serves as the poster child for negative identity, but it can also be a source for empowerment. I invite the monster into this research, thus aligning my stance with feminist theorist Karen Barad's optimism for the monster as an entity that holds the potential to disrupt normative relations; it is "an invitation to explore new ways of being in touch, new forms of becoming, new possibilities for kinship, alliance, and change (2015: 410)". The monster in my research is a woman who is also a drag queen, and she invites to think of a different modality of performing femininity; one that is rooted in vulnerability, making gaps, glitching, and allowing an overflow of excess meanings to pull into new worlds anyone, who exchanges gazes with her. I will untangle this strange kinship through addressing the technological aspects that create these connections.

³ Etymologically, the word monster has a double meaning. It means to 'demonstrate', Latin: demonstrare, as well as to 'teach' and to 'warn', Latin: monere, thus indicating the monster's role in knowledge production, and validating the monster's presence in academic discourse.

Gender studies scholar Jack Halberstam (1995) has argued that technologies of monsters are also technologies of sex. I would like to expand this understanding and argue that technologies of monsters are also technologies of gender. This presumption allows me to connect femininity, monstrosity, and drag in order to create a methodology for a femme drag performance practice that disrupt normative ways of performing femininity on stage thus shifting narratives of womanhood⁴. I use the term *narrative*⁵ quite openly, referring both to the way humans tell stories about themselves, and the way written accounts of events enter academia. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway (2011) has stressed the importance of narratives that we tell ourselves and others, because the stories we tell not only create the worlds we live in, but they also materialize in our bodies. Through not separating artistic storytelling from academic discourse, I want to stress the importance of both accounts in the formation of identity. For myself as an emerging artist and researcher, identity is an important topic. The need to develop my own voice and to overcome my own normative patterns of thinking, doing, and making, is fueling this research. Although the starting point of this research project might be my personal needs and struggles, my hope is that through this work I will find kin in other drags and monsters.

⁴ Here I understand womanhood as the state and condition of being a woman, again, regardless of the assigned sex or gender at birth or assumptions within society.

⁵ Although narrative is an important notion in this research, I am more interested in the elements that influence it, therefore I will not go into detail of what a narrative is or what does it do.

Women deemed as monstrous have not been absent from theatre stages; on the contrary, abject and grotesque women on feminist theatre stages and performance art sites can be found since the 1960s. When performing queer and deviant femininities, a common strategy for many feminist theatre practitioners is the use of critical mimicry to re-perform gender in a way that marks the gap between discursive constructs of 'woman', femininity and the performer (Shoemaker, 2004: 24). The gap allows excess meaning to exceed hegemonic representations and to take an ironic distance that alienates ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, and class, thus disrupting normative narratives of identity. I find this strategy of adopting critical mimicry, which is closely tied to aesthetics of the grotesque, problematic, because they reinforce ideas that feminine bodies are abject. However, in my own practice working with femme drag I do adopt a feminist mimesis⁶. As philosopher Luce Irigaray argues, mimesis in feminist practices must take the feminine role deliberately, therefore moving from subordination to affirmation and then to subversion (1985: 76). Therefore, in this research I am looking for an alternative way of creating gaps; one that does not require mimicry, aesthetics of excess (not to confuse with excess meaning) and grotesque. This has led me to the following research question that I will be addressing in this thesis:

⁶ I follow performance scholar Elin Diamond's understanding of feminist mimesis as a form of self-critical representation and a mode of interpretation (1997, i-ii).

In what ways can the notion of glitch support the performance of a deviant and monstrous femininity?

I will be engaging in a diffractive writing practice and bringing my process of creating *The Ghost of Me* and the findings of- and the reflection on- this performance in conversation with theories on gender, drag performance, glitch, and monster theory. This thesis is divided into three parts.

In Chapter 1, I review the literature on the major notions that I work with in my artistic practice, such as gender technologies, glitch, and monsters. I also introduce the ethical approach I take and its importance in the artistic process. I proceed to connect the theoretical notions with the ethical approach to form a theoretical ground for the methodology that I will be applying when creating the performance *The Ghost of Me*.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the main principles of femme queen performance practice and bring into discussion my own process of approaching and creating a drag persona. I identify the core principles, performative strategies, and methods used in *The Ghost of Me*, as well as the risks encountered. Bringing in two other performance works, I attempt to define gaps within my research and connect it to a wider theatre context.

In the concluding chapter I summarize the core principles, performance strategies and artistic methods that compose the methodology I propose in this research. Lastly, I examine the limitations of it and propose further research.

1. TECHNOLOGIES OF GENDERS AND MONSTERS

Through this practice-led research project, I developed a methodology for femme drag practice that incorporates glitch as a disruptive tool for creating gaps in the performance of a technologically gendered body. I arrived at this through incorporating relevant research from posthumanist feminist theory, feminist new materialism, gender studies, critical glitch studies, and monster theory into feminist theatre and drag practices. My intention was to find an intersectional space where my artistic and academic interests could manifest in a practice that allows me to explore a deviant identity. The performance *The Ghost of Me* is influenced by the technologies of gender and monsters manifested in a femme queen (I will give a detailed account on the persona and the performance in Chapter 2), therefore this chapter will explore the notions of gender, glitch, and their connection to monstrosity in more detail.

1.1. PROSTHETIC GENDER AND GLITCHED BODIES

Drawing from the technological shift in posthumanist feminist theory, gender in this research project is understood as fundamentally technological. The merging of biology and technology that has resulted in the notion of a techno-body has been a subject in postmodernity and an image in Western

culture since the end of 1980s. Scholar Anne Balsamo states that the reconceptualization of the human body as a techno-body means that it belongs simultaneously to two systems of meaning - 'the organic/natural' and the 'technological/cultural' - making it a boundary concept (1996: 5-9); and, as gender is related to both the physiological characteristics of the human body and the cultural context where that body makes sense (ibid., 10), gender is a boundary concept, too. In this paradigm gender is located in the touching of the borders of both systems. However, Preciado indicates that it is impossible to isolate bodies from the social forces that construct gender differences (2018: 129). Thus, when theorizing gender, I am approaching it as an overlapping, a folding of the systems understood as 'organic' and 'technological'. In my practice, gender is not anymore located on the edge or boundary of something, rather, it is always moving within the layers and folds that make up a (drag) body.

To think of gender as technological entails to think both metaphorically and literally. According to Haraway (1988), metaphors operate both in the symbolic domain and in the material-semiotic domain where they become material figurations⁷. In this research project, I have taken Preciado's invitation to look at bodies as visually constructed sites

⁷ Haraway's figurations are performative images that can be inhabited.

that entail thinking in both prosthetic and symbolic terms. Therefore, gender in my drag practice materializes as a set of low-technologies⁸, such as wigs, make-up, breast inserts and hip/butt padding, further referred to as gender prosthesis, constituting Femme Queen's gender expression. Technologies are not just physical artifacts, but also embodiments of certain knowledges, beliefs, desires, texts, institutions, and rules, too (Balsamo, 1996: 10, Preciado, 2018: 126), therefore, my aesthetic choices of these gender prosthesis are linked to the expected expression of normative femininity, though exaggerated in a proper drag manner. It is important to note that prosthesis are not just replacements of missing organs, but they are also the modification of existing organs influencing the production of subjectivity (Preciado, 2018: 135-137). Through enhancing my body with gender-affirming extensions, I am able to extend my subjectivity and embody the persona of Femme Queen. In my previous drag performances of embodying a masculine subject, the task for gender prosthesis has always been to replicate what is anatomically missing and thus extend my consciousness to a ghost limb (soft pecker) or to ignore another part (taped-down breasts). What is different in the process of embodying a femme queen, is that the prosthesis call for an extension of awareness to what the body already has.

⁸ Low-tech here is understood as simple, easily fabricated and cheaply produced technologies that are easy to operate and comprehend.

Gender as a technology marks the body as specific, but it becomes destabilized when the boundaries of the body get destabilized technologically. In this research project, I transpose the notion of glitch from digital technologies to body technologies to account for destabilization and technological failures in gender beyond the digital domain. In digital technologies, glitch is a messy moment, a disruption and break, that allows to look inside of a software's inner structure revealing how this digital space is organized (Sundén, 2015), often leaving the viewer with a gap in meaning that evokes feelings of perplexity. Visual artist and researcher Rosa Menkman shows that glitch, although remaining strictly in the digital system, is made sense of in visual art practices through a synthesis of different agents and contexts materializing in an artifact (2011: 34). When glitch is approached from body technologies, a similar materialization occurs: it is made visible through the ways gender is expressed materially. For the purpose of this research and the context of performance practices, I propose body glitch to refer to glitches found in body technologies, and I define it as a disruption in normative gender expression that opens a gap for excess meaning to emerge. I partly align my definition with Gender Studies scholar Jenny Sundén who argues that, when the gendered body is no longer thought as natural but constructed and technologically mediated, and when technology is thought as inseparable from- and interdependent with- the human subject, moments of technologically produced non-

necessities of gender coherence, or glitch, emerge (2015). Sundén uses her definition when approaching transfeminine individuals which involves a crossing between the sex assigned at birth and the expected corresponding gender expression, however, I am interested in situations where the sex and gender expressions both align with femininity, thus the non-necessity of gender coherence in my practice has a different materialization. The body glitch does not cause the body-machine to collapse, but it does influence how it performs and is interpreted by other individuals. Ultimately, the body glitch reveals the performativity and prostheticity of gender technologies and the conventions of gender norms and ideals that haunt the inner workings of a gendered body. Writer and curator Legacy Russell argues that glitch is a body's non-performance within a binary assignment. In her manifesto *Glitch Feminism* (2021:23), she proposes to look at glitch as a strategy for refusal of normative gender expression. Although Russell refers to bodies with an online presence, her point is that glitch can also be non-accidental. This is a strategy I also adopt, and, to expand my definition on body glitch, I suggest that the nature of body glitch is purely intentional. Sundén (2015) argues that every technological invention is also an invention of technological failure, even when technological developments are driven by the desire to create flawless systems. Femininity as a technological invention is inherently failed due to the unattainability of it; there will always be bodies who are too feminine, not feminine enough, feminine

in the wrong ways. Body glitch, both as an aesthetical choice and as a performance strategy in *The Ghost of Me*, stages the ways gender is and can be broken. *Femme Queen* is an exaggeration of perfect femininity; while flirting with the borders of grotesque, she inevitably becomes monstrous in her failed attempt to reach perfect femininity. However, besides the liberating and empowering aspects of becoming a deviant body through the workings of body glitch, there are also real dangers lurking in the dark corners of the stage and outside the theatre hall, such as violence, subjugation, assimilation, and even death.

The existence of glitch is the clearest indicator that technologies, in fact, are not seamless and perfect, they are vulnerable to internal and external forces that threaten to muddle the system. The fall of technology's indestructible image and the emergence of glitched bodies hold a very real threat to social order, and consequently these bodies often become subjects to violence. Russell argues that glitched bodies (within the realm of the digital) cannot be read by a normative mainstream, so they remain invisible, un surveilled and uncategorized (Russell, 2021: 25-27), and therefore resisting normative programming (ibid., 85). When thinking of glitched bodies, I see a parallel to what philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari call subjects in the process of becoming-imperceptible (2005: 281-282). Philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti explains

that becoming-imperceptible marks the death of any notion of identity: "it cannot be recognized, it is a radical displacement which traces patterns of estrangement and deterritorialization (Braidotti, 2006: 156)". However, the glitched bodies on and off stage or the subjects aspiring to become imperceptible, although avoiding recognition, are not invisible nor are they immaterial. In fact, they are very real. Consequently, due to the inability for normative categories to be applied onto these bodies, and the lack of sense they bring, these subjects historically have been deemed monstrous and monsters facing different governing and punishing measures executed by the hetero-patriarchal society they inhabit. Therefore, in the next sections I will look closer at the monstrous subject in order to find companionship in navigating through the risks, joys, and ethics that the implication of body glitch calls to attend to.

1.2. WHAT DO MONSTERS HAVE TO DO WITH GENDER?⁹

Monsters are not just metaphorical, they are also real as embodiments of the feared and the hated: women, queer people, people of color, disabled people; they all live with the material effects of being rendered monstrous (Hellstrand et al., 2018, 156). Monstrosity, and the fear and disgust

⁹ Historically, the 18th century image of a man-machine, where the male body was imagined as a mechanical totality, transitioned to the 19th century image of a living machine represented by women and monsters (Preciado, 2018: 132), therefore making monsters experts on gender-related topics.

it gives rise to, is historically conditioned. Queer scholar Jack Halberstam argues that monsters have been used to produce race, class, gender, and sexuality within narratives of certain subjects and their relation to subjectivity (1995: 6). In this research project, the category of the monstrous is very welcomed, even encouraged. My goal in creating Femme Queen was not only to create a femme queen, but also a monster, and through this category particularly I am able to assess the impact of glitch in the forming of narratives around deviant femininity.

One would assume that monsters, being the epitome of negative identity, are the perfect Other against whom to assess our own normative identity. However, the relationship between Self and Other in the context of the monstrous is not that simple. Braidotti (2000, 167) argues that the monstrous is a borderline figure that blurs the boundaries between hierarchically established distinctions. The monster triggers a recognition that there is a multiplicity contained within the same entity. In other words, monsters demonstrate that the boundary between self and other is blurry; a monster is never totally merged nor totally separate from the human that observes it. This points to two aspects of the monster: the disruptive force it holds, and the inherent vulnerability that is the state of the monster's existence. Thus, what makes the interaction with monsters disruptive is not the physical proximity but the realization that they may not be outside from

the self after all. What we see mirrored in the monster are the vulnerabilities of our own embodied being. The encounter with the monster opens a risk of indifferentiation, but it also opens hope of interrupting oppressive identities (Shildrick, 2002: 4-5). What the monster challenges us to do, is to learn to think of monstrosity not as an impairment, but an unfolding of possibilities that offer positive alternatives to everyone (Braidotti, 2000: 172). Hence, the monster calls for a rethinking of ethics towards the other as rooted in acknowledging the vulnerability of both the self and other (Shildrick, 2002: 3). Vulnerability is defined by openness and the related ability to be affected and affect others in uncontrollable ways. It is a form of exposure to what we might be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with, therefore vulnerability can be unsettling and result in prompting fear, defensiveness, and avoidance (Gilson, 2004: 2-4). Thus, an ethics of vulnerability lies in how we deal with vulnerability and do we change our actions and way of thinking (ibid., 4). In the encounter with the monster, an ethics of vulnerability would manifest in whether we listen to the monster or ignore it; whether we allow its excess to overflow us or do we assert control over it; whether we change our actions or continue with old practices. This kind of ethics informs the way how I engage with the monster as a concept, as a body, as myself, and as the audience member.

Vulnerability requires an openness and receptivity from both sides; vulnerability in an encounter with the monster asks

to respond differently to how usual meetings with monsters happen (most often it means death, and most likely for the monster). In the moments where unexpected vulnerability disrupts an expected line of events, a gap in meaning is formed. I will define this kind of gap as narrative glitch. As with body glitch, narrative glitch exposes the conventions, norms, and expectations in normative storytelling, at the same time opening opportunities for an unexpected unfolding of events. As with one failure following the next one, one glitch opens space for other glitches to happen. I will expand on narrative glitch in the next chapter when addressing the performance *The Ghost of Me*.

A shared ethics of vulnerability opens the possibility of the unfolding of different relations; one that reveals the self as “reciprocally constituted by others, always fundamentally interconnected and interwoven with the selves of others, permeable, and both mutable and in the process of altering (ibid., 178)”. Thus, ethics of vulnerability are crucial for creating new narratives about the self, others, and the common spaces and places we share. In the context of this research, an ethics of vulnerability are present not only in the encounter with the monster, but also in the process of becoming one.

1.3. BECOMING-MONSTER

Braidotti (2000) argues that to become a monster one must desire monsters. Becoming, put forth by Deleuze and Guattari

(2005: 237-238) is a dynamic, fluid, non-representational, performative process catalyzed by desire (understood not as lack, but as positivity) that releases the subject from hierarchical binary categories and instead deals with multiciplities. Gender Studies scholar Margrit Shildrick (2018: 173-174) suggests that the process of becoming-monster as an opportunity to escape the reality of exclusionary binary identities is equally open to subjects seen as normative and subjects already labelled as monstrous. Instead of becoming one or the other, the flow of desire in the becoming-monster invites a concorporeality where the self and other are no longer distinct. As becoming-monster might be liberating for all subjects, still, the feminine subject might face greater risks than any other subject. Returning to the statement that women already have been defined as monsters, two problems might arise when women claim, become or embrace monstrosity. Firstly, by naming themselves monsters, women are affirming a condition for women that was not chosen by women. Secondly, there is a risk of romanticizing subjugation and reaffirming traditional discursive paradigms (MacCormack, 2004). Another threat of becoming-monster is that someone else will name them the wrong kind of monsters within the wrong episteme (ibid.). This threat is linked to appropriating a concept that is linked to traditional exercises of power in the form of naming others. The becoming-monster holds an even higher risk of being highly problematic when a normative subject uses the appeal of the monstrous in order to escape

structures of their own life by identifying what appears to be transgressive to them (Shildrick, 2018: 172-173). What these arguments show is that a non-critical engagement in becoming-monster is harmful, especially to those who already live as monsters. However, there might be a way how to enter this becoming ethically. Deleuze and Guattari's original concept of becoming has been criticized due to the power dynamics of a dominant subject (majoritarian) needing an other (minoritarian) to access this transformation. To avoid a becoming through someone else, I propose to engage with becoming-monster as a becoming with someone else, in other words, a co-becoming. Thus, a co-becoming utilizes an ethics of vulnerability by approaching the transformation with responsiveness to our own vulnerability and that of the other, and a critical disposition towards the norms that would make us invulnerable¹⁰. In this way, becoming-monster for both normative and already monstrous subjects allows to escape patterns that reinforce the dangerous narratives that this movement is trying to resist in the first place.

Then, the ethical task, when taking the monster on stage, is to find new narratives and representations for it. Alternative representations, such as Haraway's figuration, are ways of representing what has been left in a blind spot. I see

¹⁰ Vulnerability in capitalistic Western societies is seen as a weakness, therefore, the invulnerability advocated for perpetuates oppression and denial of responsibility (Gilson, 2004: 177-178).

figuration as an opportunity for an ethical materialization of monsters, and I have used this method in the creation of the persona of Femme Queen. Braidotti describes a conceptual persona created through figuration not a metaphor, but "a materially embodied stage of metamorphosis of a dominant subject towards all that the phallogocentric system does not want it to become (Braidotti, 2000, 170-171)", however, I would suggest that also non-dominant subjects have the same opportunity of taking on a persona in the same ways as becoming-monster is open for all subjects. Femme Queen as a monstrous persona embodies what the phallogocentric views as dangerous: a deviant identity that creates ruptures, gaps, and shifts uncovering the broken technologies within the society-machine. Then, what Femme Queen offers, are situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) found in the speculative fabulation (Haraway, 2011) that gives her flesh. Situated knowledges, as a form of knowledge coming from a distinctive perspective, have a transgressive, transformative, and material impact on alternative forms of representation.

Moreover, both notions under the umbrella Haraway calls SF, is a place to conduct inquiry into the "artifactual as a reproductive technology that might issue something other than the sacred image of the same" (Haraway, 1992: 300). As Braidotti argues, the accountability present in this knowledge is a collective and relational process that refers to the unveiling of power locations in one's identity and to

the undoing of power differences linked to narrative (2000: 171). It is important to distinguish 'narrative' from 'speculative fabulation'. Haraway (2011) notes that narrative in language and academic discourse has a specific role; it is tied to certain conventions and norms. Speculative fabulation, on the other hand, is closer to everyday storytelling; it is a way of making worlds that are inhabited by creatures of imagination and impossibilities. Haraway advocates for speculative fabulation to have a place in narrative, and for this research, that means working with both interconnected: creating impossible worlds through speculative fabulation and then introducing the monstrous creatures from those worlds in the narrative I am building in this thesis.

The monster is often silenced; when the right to speak, to see, to exist is forbidden, the abject conditions for the monstrous are re-enacted over and over again. In this chapter, I gave an overview of how I have been theorizing the monster and monstrosity in connection to gender and the technologies that make genders (and monsters). The self-critical and responsible way how to engage with monsters, and ultimately, how to become one, has led me to adopt an ethics of vulnerability which I take with me further into practice. In the next chapter I will address the artistic work that I have created through taking in the theoretical notions and the ethical approaches discussed in this chapter.

2. TECHNOLOGIES OF THE FEMME QUEEN

In the context of this research, I created a femme drag persona *Femme Queen* (see fig. 1) as a figuration that materializes as both a body of matter and a body of thought. In this chapter, I will explore the main aspects of femme drag performance and probe my own process of creating one. Furthermore, I will describe how the notion of glitch has been applied to my artistic practice in creating *The Ghost of Me*.

The performance *The Ghost of Me* (45") is an attempt to give the monster centerstage. The performance mechanism consists of a repeated lip-sync performance by a femme queen. The first part of the performance is a repetition of the same act of a simple choreography, changing proximity towards the audience, establishing eye contact with audience members, and devoting each verse to a different audience member (see fig. 2).

Between the repeating acts, there are long pauses that are used to gaze at the audience. Around the middle part of the performance, with every new act, the femme queen removes one piece of her costume and gives it to the audience member to whom the song was dedicated to (see fig. 3). As the performance progresses, the music becomes disrupted and

**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**



Figure 1. Femme Queen. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.

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PRACTICES**



Figure 2. Devoting a verse to an audience member. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.

**HOME OF
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PRACTICES**



Figure 3. Removing the costume as an offering. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.



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Figure 4. Femme Queen's drag body. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.

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Figure 5. Femme Queen's shoe being put back on. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.

**HOME OF
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PRACTICES**



Figure 6. Femme Queen's wig being put back on. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou.

the pauses between the repetitions and the musical bridges between verse and refrain disappear, ultimately leading to noise which then breaks into silence. At that moment, several audience members have received pieces from the femme queen's costume and her drag body (not the performer's body) is revealed (see fig. 4).

After a pause, the femme queen approaches the audience once again, this time implying with gestures for the costume to be put back on her (see fig. 5 & 6). When the full costume is once again on, the femme queen performs her final act, however this time singing it live to a distorted version of the music. The performance ends with the femme queen exiting the stage.

Before entering the theatre hall, the audience members received program notes (see Appendix A) that gave a short introduction to the ongoing research and a brief description of the performance. Assuming a general knowledge of drag performances, I did not give additional information about drag practices. However, for the context of this research, I will briefly address the specificity of femme drag performance before deconstructing my own performance in terms of methodology .

2.1. LOCATING THE FEMME QUEEN IN LANGUAGE AND ON STAGE

Much of the scholarly work on drag that I had accessed during the course of this research project has been written from the understanding of drag as a cross-gender performance done by cisgender men (drag queens) or cisgender women (drag kings). The idea that drag must entail a crossing to the 'opposite' of the 'true' gender identity of the performer reassures that there is a biological sex-based gender identity, ironically making drag less subversive than it is theorized to be (Farrier, 2020: 106). I came into this research project convinced that there are more performers like myself - cisgender women performing as drag queens, however, I was met with a gap. Compared to the more traditional drag queen that is embodied by an AMAB¹¹ man, there is little written on the phenomenon of AFAB women performing as drag queens, and the first difficulty of locating this type of drag was the question of finding a name.

There are several titles available describing drag queens embodied by AFAB women, such as bioqueen, faux queen, hyperqueen, femme queen, female drag queen, cis queen, AFAB queen. I find some of the names more problematic than others, for example, the bio- in bioqueen might refer

¹¹ The term AMAB is used to refer to a person's biological sex and it stands for assigned male at birth.

to a biological determinism prohibiting people, who do not associate their gender with their sex, from participation; or the faux- in faux queen implies a certain degree of ineptitude of not being 'a real man' doing 'real drag queening'. For this research project, I will use the term AFAB queen, as it seems to me the most inclusive, yet specific name to refer to any type of drag queen performance done by an AFAB woman; however, I am adopting the term femme queen to refer to my own specific drag practice as a queer, femme¹² AFAB woman performing as a hyperfeminine drag queen.

After using the correct keywords in search for other AFAB queens, I was met with another problem: one of location the AFAB queen in academic discourse, which is connected to her status in queer spaces. The AFAB queen's performance of hyperfemininity is closer to the drag queen performances done by AMAB men than those of drag kings, because AFAB queens "parody, embody, express, or otherwise perform femininity through the use of high-pitched voices, exaggerated body shaping, drag-style makeup, and frilly, sparkly, and otherwise ostentatious clothing (Herrera, 2020: 40-41)", thus making the AFAB queen visually and performatively undistinguishable from the AMAB queen. However, their participation in drag culture is debated

¹² The 'femme' refers to a styling of the body in queer culture; the queer femme is a "non-heterosexual individual whose gender performance is readably feminine (Herrera, 2020: 19)"

amongst the cisgender gay men who are the historical performers of drag queens, leading to arguments against the participation of AFAB queens in drag practices. In the context of this research, I will not be going into the social and political issues around validation of which bodies are allowed to perform as drag queens, but it is important to be aware that such problematics exist and that they have material consequences, such as social indignation, accusations of cultural appropriation, and misogyny (Farrier, 2020: 105). My focus in this research is not on the body underneath the drag, but on the possibilities which that specifically marked body can do while in drag.

Besides the lack of acknowledgment within queer spaces, there are some differences that, I argue, work in the AFAB queen's advantage. From a feminist perspective, the femme queen offers a feminist consciousness and employs a performance that queers heteronormative discourses of femininity (Shoemaker, 2004: 94-95) due to the position of the performers themselves being socialized as women at some point in their off-stage lives. A femme queen dragging discursive femininity thus engages in self-reflexivity. The female body which lays underneath the costume signifies differently than a male body, and when the costume comes off, the female body does not disappear with it, therefore creating an excess of meaning to work with. The femme queen is able to mark the labour of femininity from the sign system

of a woman while creating an obvious gap between the performer and the performance, making strange what often is considered to be natural. This gap between the performance and performer is foundational to drag practices. However, in femme drag practices, the audience's recognition of the performance as drag is crucial, otherwise women-dragging-women might be read as a celebration of feminine norms instead of a disruption of a normative sign system.

2.2. MAKING/DOING A DRAG BODY

In the simplest terms, drag queens are an exaggeration of quotidian femininity; hence the quotidian gender of 'woman' being the baseline from which to create a drag persona¹³ and its aesthetics. Drag as an art form borrows from itself; drag performers "often appropriate what they see, replicating images and blending new ideas from them - a process whereby a performance is marked by that from which it borrows or references (Farrier, 2020: 104)". When creating Femme Queen, I did not have any specific references, however, there was a drag queen whose work has inspired my practice greatly. Visual artist Sin Wai Kin, formerly known by their drag name Victoria Sin (Princess Julia, McKenzie, 2016; see fig. 7), became my drag mother without them knowing about it.

¹³ It is important to note that Femme Queen, as most drags, is a persona rather than a character. A character is a representation of another person on stage, film or in literature, but a persona is a non-representational alter ego of the same person.



Figure 7. Image of Victoria Sin's make-up that was used as reference for Femme Queen's drag look. Photo: Ronan McKenzie (Princess Julia, McKenzie, 2016).

Sin, being of Chinese decent, uses speculative fiction in performing white, hyper-sexualized femininity and the labour of it across different mediums, however the live performances are characterized by a Jessica Rabbit and Marilyn Monroe inspired character performing low-effort tasks with the greatest disinterest and boredom towards them. Approaching Victoria Sin as a drag mother, Femme Queen draws visual inspiration from their style category¹⁴. Sin's drag persona represents the Western classic beauty standards, thus the styling of the body emphasizes an hourglass shape (large breasts, small waist, curvy hips) which then is wrapped in a costume reminiscence of old-school Hollywood glamour. I opted for a similar glamour look, however my aesthetic choices were different. Sin uses professionally made padding and silicone breast plates, however I made my own padding from materials that were available to me at the time. Furthermore, Sin choses platinum blonde wigs and erases their Asian features through heavy make-up and painting their face white. I used Sin's make-up style as a reference to create Femme Queen's look, however, my choice of a white face differed from Sin's reasoning.

Unlike Sin who uses the white face to cover their otherness, my strategy was to make my whiteness more visible because

¹⁴ Drag queen styles can be grouped in 3 larger categories: intelligible queens (drag queens that are intelligible to mainstream audiences), campy queens (drag queens whose style is exaggerated to a comedic degree), and alternative queens (drag queens who take drag beyond mainstream ideas) (Herrera, 2020, 76-79).

of the status of white skin that makes race invisible on white bodies. Through exaggerating my whiteness, I play with the idea of a ghost as a monster and the idea of ghosting as a social phenomenon. Ghosting is a "form of critical citation whose form depends on recognizable/readable norms against which the resistant performance operates (Shoemaker, 2004: 47)", and my intention was to emphasize that women (and Femme Queen) will always be ghosted by not only feminine norms, but also their whiteness, class, and sexuality. As Butler reminds us, race, sexuality, and sexual difference are sites where one cannot be constituted without the other (2011); regimes of femininity are historically constructed and inflected by sexuality, race, age, and class, ultimately making a mark on the body. Interrogating ways how white bodies perform whiteness is crucial in order to avoid the reiteration of normalizing whiteness as an unmarked, natural condition. What drag can do is to illuminate the ways gender and race are intertwined, coded and decoded.

During the performance of *The Ghost of Me*, the white drag face never comes off. Although the sweat smudges the make-up, the performer never fully emerges from the gaps in the foundation. However, what is revealed in the process of undressing, are the gender prosthesis that create the drag body: a bra with a cup size four times too big that is stuffed with pillow fluff stuffed tights; and a patchwork corset; cycling shorts with sewed-on rubber foam pads with an uneven

surface that are pressed down on the body with another layer of thin tights - all in different and mismatching shades of beige. However, the female body of the performer always remains covered. The decision to allow the audience to see only the inner working of the drag body's technology avoids the trap of suggesting that, indeed, underneath the exaggerated and parodic mask of femininity there is a 'real' and 'natural' womanliness waiting to be liberated. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition between a female body and a hyperfeminine drag creates what I have defined as body glitch, therefore opening space for thinking what does femininity require from a body.

Yet, there might be other strategies how to create body glitch through juxtaposition; through one that does not require the performer's body to perform the unveiling. Finnish choreographer Tiia Kasurinen performs as a seamless, Barbie doll-like femme queen in her solo piece *I'm not entirely here (cybersad)* (2020). Inspired by Internet identities and contemporary cyber-expressions of gender and sexuality, she utilizes drag aesthetics to explore the meeting point between virtual and everyday spaces. Kasurinen's performance employs similar mechanism that I used in *The Ghost of Me*, such as building an ambiguous drag persona with a certain movement vocabulary, prolonged gazing, and the principle of transformation. However, Kasurinen's drag body remains intact the whole performance. Her aesthetics

intwine somatic movement and video format, more precisely, the phenomenon of YouTube videos. A break in the flow of the performance is created through the appearance of a YouTube tutorial of Kasurinen applying her drag makeup and thus revealing the gap between her body and the drag body. I assert that this approach creates body glitch as well because of the ways excess meaning present in this gap changes the interpretation and reception of the body on stage.

The decision to allow the audience a glimpse into the drag technology in both Kasurinen's and my performance allow to sustain a level of ambiguity in the audience's attempt to create meaning and a category for the body they are seeing. Yet, the success of achieving and sustaining this ambiguity deeply relies on the performance context. In the case of drag performances, context is an important but often overlooked component. Geographical locatedness, local nuances, relation to other cultural elements (pop culture, queer culture, etc.) all have implications on how the drag performance might be read, interpreted and analyzed by an audience (Farrier, 2016: 193-194). In fact, even the audience's general knowledge of the drag persona and the performer behind it plays a role in the interpretation process. Although the *Femme Queen* had no name nor available biography, in the context of *The Ghost of Me*, which was held in one of the facilities of the ArtEZ University of the Arts, the audience (the majority of them being teachers and cohort members of

the Performance Practices Master's program, and some of my friends) not only knew me as the performer personally, but they had previous insights from the rehearsal process part of an ongoing feedback framework. Therefore, I see a missed opportunity to explore the impact of context and the vantage of anonymity in the experience of *The Ghost of Me*.

2.3. WHAT CAN A DRAG FACE DO

Although the lack of anonymity minimized the impact of Femme Queen's body, the drag face, based on the feedback I received later, was not affected by it. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the face is part of a signifying system. However, as the signifying system of the face is different than that of language, the face can signify automatically, without the person's intention (Rushton, 2002: 219). The face is considered in terms of vision: to read a face is not a matter of interpreting certain codes, rather, it is an intuitive mode of seeing. In theorizing the face, Deleuze moves towards disembodiment of the expression on the face from the body that expresses it, therefore I have also beheaded the drag face from the section where I address the drag body. Disembodiment of the expression allows to think of the face not as a material representation of an immaterial process, but as pure affect (ibid., 219-225). When receiving feedback from the audience, vulnerability as a notion, as a state of being, and as an affect was mentioned the most (other notions were relentlessness, seduction, ambiguity, eeriness), therefore I

will focus on this particular expression in the context of the face. In Deleuze's equation, the Femme Queen's face was not just a representation of vulnerability, it was vulnerability. Instead of asking what does a face represent, Deleuze argues that it is more important to ask what can a face do. The face is both virtual and potential, and it has the possibility to open up the world for new experiences and encounters to be actualized. Deleuze and Guattari consider the face in terms of the emergence of possible worlds; in other words, they interpret

"the virtuality of the face in terms of our relations with others – other people and things in the world. They ask us to consider how do we approach others, and how does the other approach us. The other is a possible world that exists in a face that expresses it: when a person precedes another person, object, or entity, they enter a realm of possible connections, confrontations, transformations, and creations. Ultimately, what a face does is that it reshapes the world in a way that we think or feel it differently (ibid., 2002, 224-234).

Hence, my interest here is towards what can a drag face do.

In drag practices, a drag queen's face is created through applying heavy make-up exaggerating some features and concealing others to make the face appear feminine. Ultimately, the facial features are changed to the extent that the face underneath the make-up is unrecognizable. The ideal drag look for a femme queen is one that makes the audience misperceive her as a cisgendered man in drag, therefore, the goal for the femme queen's transformation is not to look like a woman, rather, it is "to look like someone who is not a woman in the first place (Herrera, 2020: 84)". Although Femme Queen

managed to create the illusion of being a cisgendered man in drag, there was a more important occurrence present.

The aforementioned vulnerability that Femme Queen's face projected, especially in the close contact with audience members, and the reciprocal exchange with vulnerabilities that happened with most audience members, opened a possibility to create different relationships. In these moments, expectations of entertainment were disrupted by the unpredictable emergence of vulnerability. Thus, what I have defined as narrative glitch in Chapter 1, opened the possibility for new narratives to emerge. Narrative glitches appear when expectations are not met; it is in the frisson between how a story has been told (implying as well, an expectation of how it will be told) and how the story is actually told in that current moment. Although these moments of glitch were short-lived and major shifts in the flow of the performance did not happen, they were nevertheless important because they marked a possibility. My initial intention was to arrive at a point of co-becoming and copoiesis¹⁵, however in this specific performance it did not happen (although there have been moments close to it before). However, the meeting with the femme queen's vulnerable face gave rise to another interesting effect.

¹⁵ I use artist and philosopher Bracha L. Ettinger's notion of copoiesis as the joint aesthetical and ethical creative potential of changing borderlines and co-creating new knowledge (2005: 705).

Some audience members expressed that in the moments of mutual gazing with Femme Queen they did not understand who was looking at them: the persona or the performer underneath. For me, this marks another welcomed gap in the performance to which I will refer to as identity glitch. My intention for creating the persona of Femme Queen was to leave her undone. The decision not to give her a name or backstory were connected to two aspects. First, I did not want her to be known and therefore limited to a single identity. Second, I wanted her to form in front of the audience, in the meeting of the eyes of the spectator. This would allow me to move within a space of ambiguity and embody a boundary: I would be neither fully myself nor fully her. I find that through this approach I managed to avoid recreating situations this thesis argues against. If I had deconstructed and stripped-down a fully developed persona to the point of my own naked body, I would have created a story of breaking out of something artificial to reveal the 'real' and 'proper' femininity underneath. Instead, I never fulfilled expectations, instead created moments of confusion. The audience members started to question my identity in moments of extended reciprocal gazing. In the meeting with the strange, monstrous face of the femme queen, and the vulnerability it expresses, there is a rupture, a gap made obvious. The extended moment of this encounter allows an overflow of meanings to start emerging. This is where identity glitch happens, and different worlds might start forming.

The importance of a reciprocal gaze should be expanded more. Being physically visible to others is always socially meaningful; it is not only a means of expression but also the formation of social reality. To look at a human is fundamentally different than to look at an object due to the mutuality of seeing. When looking at a person, there is a “simultaneity of seeing and being seen, the dimension of appealing-to and demanding-from, the character of encounter (Schuermann, 2019: 155)”, making the interpersonal seeing (the gaze) a special way of visual perception. The gaze serves not only as means of communication, but it is fundamental in generating social identity. According to German philosopher Helmuth Plessner, one’s identity becomes what one sees being in the eyes of the other. In other words, the way we as people appear to others determines what and who we are (ibid., 157). Therefore, the gaze can also become an instrument of subjugation and domination because reason in Western philosophy is tied to the idea of sameness and is aimed at recognizing, understanding, and taking possession of the other. However, French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas argues that in a reciprocal gazing, the action of returning the gaze makes it impossible to regard a person as objectified (ibid., 166). For Lévinas, the face of the other which is met in the reciprocal gaze, holds an asymmetric relationship. The nakedness and vulnerability of the other’s face keeps the ‘I’ captive and binds it to an ethical responsibility resisting appropriation and objectification (ibid., 167). Moreover, the

reciprocal gaze opens opportunity for humans to partake in mimetic transformation (ibid., 157); it radically destabilizes how we see ourselves, others and the world, allowing different possibilities, configurations and worlds to emerge.

I would like to mention one such mimetic transformation that took place just before the premiere of *The Ghost of Me*, as it demonstrates how the power of reciprocal gazing, ethics of vulnerability, affect, and a glitched femme drag performance can create new connections and build worlds. In a session with my supervisor, cross-disciplinary artist Fenia Kotsopoulou, I performed *The Ghost of Me* just for her. For 45 minutes, we kept our eyes locked while I performed my routine and gradually undressed. Around the middle part of the performance Fenia started to mimic me by lip-syncing the song and repeating some of my movements, eventually putting on some of the clothing items I had already taken off. As the performance progressed, I was stripped from my costume looking at Fenia dressed as *Femme Queen* looking back at me. Fenia then took off the costume and put it back on me while I was continuing the performance, and I did the final live singing part as a reassembled *Femme Queen*. This moment, powered by affect and mimetic transformation, was a pinnacle in this research process because it showed the potential of what this practice and approach is capable of. This experience also served for the further development of the dramaturgy of *The Ghost of Me* where I incorporated the

presenting of my costume to audience members. Although in the official premiere I did not reach a similarly powerful moment as I had experienced with Fenia, it did reassure me that such a moment is possible; that a ghost might not only persist, but also flourish.

2.4. I'M A FRAUD, I'M A LIAR, I'M AN IMPOSTER, I'M A CHARLATAN.

These are some of the lyrics from the song *Poltergeist* by Notanatomy (Lilita Dunska & Luiza Pinzon, 2020, see Appendix B). The *Ghost of Me* is built around an extended lip-sync of this particular song where the original vocals are replaced with my own. Lip-syncing is foundational in the art of drag. There is a particular split between the vocal sound and the bodily production of voice when performing a lip-sync: the sound exits from an amplification system and the lip-syncer mimics the production of sound not only with their mouth but the whole body in perfect synchronization. What creates the artistry, is the moment where the drag performer is actively listening to the voice coming from the loudspeaker while simultaneously performing a rehearsed listening of the quotidian speech through the synchronization of the movements of the mouth, breath, and body (Bird, 2019: 48). This practice holds an important function within queer communities and spaces, as it functions as a way to curate, create and recall queer histories.

As Haraway reminds us, it matters what stories we tell (2011), therefore the story *Femme Queen* presents through the song and the way the song is presented cannot be overlooked. When there is an urgency for transformation of identities and societies, narrative starts to play an important role because the self is narratively constructed. Narrative arises from both a sequence of bodily experiences, perceptions, and actions (Menary, 2008: 75), and the stories connected to these experiences. The song *Poltergeist* holds a number of hints and commentary towards powers that are responsible in constituting identity, such as the gaze, self-other relationship, fear of being rendered monstrous, the labour of sustaining an acceptable identity.

The song *Poltergeist* was used as the basis of the performance's dramaturgy, gradually transforming into a monstrous ballade that haunts the *Femme Queen* in her lip-sync hell. What is more important, the dramaturgy was built on the decision for it to function as a narrative glitch on its own. When creating the narrative glitch of the dramaturgy of *The Ghost in Me*, I appropriated a method of narrative disruption, which functions as an additional method to approaches I have already defined as narrative glitch before. Introduced by opera and theatre director Yuval Sharon, narrative disruption employs three strategies: 1) changing the storyteller, 2) changing the content of the narrative, 3) resisting conventional narrative structures (Sharon, 2016).

Sharon's method stems from a practice that uses text as a basis for building a performance work, however it was applicable in the context of *The Ghost of Me*. To address the first point, I allowed the monstrous figure to become the narrator of its own life; for the second point, I opted for hope for the monster by creating situations of vulnerability and openness, instead of destruction or assimilation; to implement the third point, I removed a beginning and an ending from the story and focused on a continuous becoming for the allotted time frame of the performance.

A masterful example of disrupting (glitching) a narrative can be found in the performance *The Making of Pinocchio: Digital Edition* (2021) by artist duo Rosana Cade and Ivor MacAskill. Taking the story of Pinocchio, they intertwine their own autobiography and experiences following MacAskill's gender transition, making Pinocchio a contemporary trans-masculine narrative. Cade and MacAskill switch between different characters of the story and themselves, always approaching each body from a distance and subtle alienation yet vulnerability and openness. Through the plurality of perspectives and an approach of storytelling that detours within the original story, they queer the tale of Pinocchio to a state where it becomes something else. Moreover, the gaps they create in the construction of bodies also reveal what I have identified as body and identity glitches, especially in the moments where documentations of MacAskill's body in the

many stages of his transition are juxtaposed. Here, gender's deeper and more advanced technologies - testosterone as a prosthesis produced by the pharmapornographic industry (Preciado, 2018) and alterations to the physical body (top surgery) - are revealed. This indicates that glitch is already inside the body, therefore revealing possibilities for further research in thinking and doing the body on stage and beyond. Moreover, the example of *The Making of Pinocchio: Digital Edition* indicates the fertile grounds for exploring what glitch could do to gender expressions other than femininity, especially when the body in question already has destabilized fixed gender and sex categories.

To summarize, in this chapter I have introduced the key notions within femme drag practice and described important moments in the process of making *The Ghost of Me*. Furthermore, I have given practical examples how body glitch, narrative glitch, and identity glitch as a principle can be applied in thinking and doing drag, and I have identified two other performances where I identify the presence of glitch.

CONCLUSION: THE GHOST THAT PERSISTS

The methodology stemming from this research is a monstrous creation. It is an assemblage of theories, ideas, artworks, meeting points, and affects that I have encountered in the process. Throughout this thesis, I have identified the core principles (body glitch, identity glitch, narrative glitch), core performative strategies (repetition, proximity, temporality), and core methods (figuration and speculative fabulation), as well as the ethical approach of my methodology. I will summarize my findings by making an overview of the developed methodology, and propose further research.

In this thesis, I responded to what I perceived to be a gap in feminist theatre practices regarding the strategies utilized when addressing femininity through performing a deviant identity. I argued that performance strategies that utilize critical mimicry and the aesthetics of grotesque as an ironic stance risks reinforcing abjection as bound to femininity and womanhood. Thus, I asked:

In what ways can the notion of glitch support the performance of a deviant and monstrous femininity?

In order to address this question, I engaged in a rigorous review of relevant theory on the technologies of gender, monsters, and drag, and attempted to transpose the notion of glitch from digital technologies to performance practices. Through a practice-led research I applied the theoretical notions to my femme drag practice, devised a solo drag performance and developed a methodology of creating performance work that embraces deviant and monstrous femininity in order to shift narratives of womanhood. Below, I will unpack each element within my methodology.

Body glitch. As a tool for thinking and doing disruptions in normative gender expressions, body glitch invites a speculative approach in the ways how gender could be 'opened' and explored from 'within'. The goal of body glitch is to create a gap in the assumed coherence of gender expression and to produce excess meaning. A materialization of body glitch starts from assessing which marks are already inscribed in the performers body, such as gender, sex, sexuality, race, body type, etc. Body glitch is intentional, figurational, and aesthetic, therefore it is made visible through a juxtaposition between a persona, that accentuates the body's marks, and the performer's body.

Identity glitch. Identity glitch refers to the ambiguous movement between self and persona and challenges fixed categories of identity. Identity glitch appears in the reciprocal

meeting with the other. The goal of identity glitch is to avoid recognition, instead, to make visible the process of becoming from one identity to another. Identity glitch is closely linked to body glitch, however, it appears in the (non)performance of a persona. It is useful to think what are the factors available in a theatre performance that might support the opportunity for creating gaps where identity glitch could materialize. In the case of *The Ghost of Me*, pauses in music allowed a detour from centerstage to audience seats, and reciprocal gazing provided another opportunity to flirt with an ambiguous self.

Narrative glitch. Narrative glitch is dependent on creating unexpected moments within a seemingly prospective setting (additionally, this means creating a setting with a reoccurring pattern, if the narrative or story presented is not commonly known). There are a few approaches that I have proposed in this research. One approach is connected to intentional breaks in the narrative through changing the perspective from which the story is told; through changing the content of the story through adding, removing, or reassembling the events of the story; through changing the way how the story is being told by experimenting with the structure of the story. The other approach requires vulnerability and giving up control to allow the emergence of events that are co-constituted by the reaction and action of the audience members.

Repetition. Repetition is linked to the machine-like nature of a performance and the performativity of gender. Repetition uncovers the labour of keeping a system running smoothly, thus any deviation will become visible when differentiation appears. In the context of *The Ghost of Me*, repetition is also connected to processes of desire and the forces that restrict it. As a core performative strategy, repetition allows to visualize any intentional and accidental glitches.

Proximity. Proximity is essential in achieving a state of openness and vulnerability. Physical proximity breaks the wall between the performer and the audience member, thus inviting participation and potentially a copoiesis. Moreover, proximity addresses the complexity of vision because one way of looking prevents from seeing otherwise. In the context of *The Ghost of Me*, proximity was linked to both physical closeness and the presence of reciprocal gazing.

Temporality. There is a strong connection between narrative and linear time, therefore temporality holds an important role in meaning making. Ruptures in linear time, such as pauses, extensions, and lack of progression, invites vertical time; in other words, it is an opportunity to stay longer in a moment and explore the depths of it, rather than moving on to the next event.

Figuration and speculative fabulation. Part of the bigger term that Haraway calls SF, these are technologies for creating artifactualities and something other than the same. Figuration and speculative fabulation is replete with human and nonhuman creatures, their stories, materialities, and narratives. It is an intra-action¹⁶ between research and art-making, both requiring facts and fiction. In the context of *The Ghost of Me*, figuration and speculative fabulation provided the ideas and stories which shaped the ideas and stories in the art-making and thesis-writing process.

Ethics of vulnerability. An ethics of vulnerability is built on the mutual openness and shared vulnerability of the moments. It is a way of opening the self to the other and acknowledging codependency in a shared space or even a shared community. In *The Ghost of Me*, vulnerability is in the letting go of that to which one has always held on to: ways of understanding oneself, interpreting actions of the other and establishing beliefs.

As with the persona I developed in the context of this research project, I have not given a name for this methodology, nor have I put a full stop in the list of its contents. Through the process of *The Ghost of Me*, I have managed to touch

¹⁶ I use the term 'intra-action' defined by feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007) as a mutual constitution of human and non-human entities with entangled agencies.

the surface of the potential of glitch in thinking and doing femininity on stage and in artistic academic discourse. Glitch has revealed the complex technologies and narrative powers that generate gender and ensures its running. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how easy deviation can happen, and how easy one can be deemed monstrous in return. In this research, I have proposed the becoming-monster as scenario for performing deviant femininity on stage, however, I have also mentioned the idea of a 'beyond the stage'. Theatre cannot change the society or politics outside its safe walls, however, it is a place for practicing changing the ways we tell stories about ourselves and others to ourselves and others. 'Beyond the stage' is also an invitation for myself to go beyond the stage where *The Ghost of Me* premiered, and to look for other stages, hopefully ones already inhabited by other monsters, to explore ways of glitching and cobecoming in joyful assemblages with others. Gender is a dangerous place to explore; the journey is safer with companions .



Figure 10. Getting in drag. Photo by Fenia Kotsopoulou

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Program notes for *The Ghost of Me*.

THE GHOST OF ME

*I'm a fraud
I'm a liar
I don't even exist
An imposter
I'm a charlatan
But I need to persist*

THE GHOST OF ME is a solo performance exploring the relationship between body and narrative through creating, breaking, and questioning a queer feminine identity embodied by a drag queen.

A research output of an ongoing practice-led research on gender technologies and the monstrosity of the white woman's body, THE GHOST OF ME challenges the narrative of gender ideology through a self-reflexive critique of femininity. Through becoming a female-to-femme drag persona, the artist and researcher Katrīna Dūka creates a desired self in relation to the audience.

There is no original gender identity; it is constituted by copying copies of ideologically produced and historically shifting roles. The woman's body who resists these copies will always be ghosted by feminine norms. How can ghosting be turned into a form of critical citation to trouble essentialist, heterosexist, and racist discourses on *natural womanliness*? Could the inherent artificiality of a feminine identity be made into a tool for joyful disruption?

THE GHOST OF ME explores these questions through the ultimate drag expression of lip syncing.

Maker and performer: Katrīna Dūka
Research supervisor: Feni Kotsopoulou
External mentor: Rosana Cade
Dramaturgical support: Barbara Lehtna
Sound designer: Lilita Dunska
Sound engineer: Jasper Ras
Movement consultant: Jana Jacuka
Technical support: Theatre "Ģertrūdes ielas teātris"
Publicity image by Kate Gecēviča
Music: "Poltergeist" by Notanatomy; © © 2021 Lilita Dunska & Luisa Pinzon

Figure 9. Program text by Katrīna Dūka.



Figure 10. Image on program notes. Photo: Kate Gecēviča.

APPENDIX B

Lyrics to the song Poltergeist by Notanatomy (Lilita Dunska & Luiza Pinzon, 2020).

*Staring at the ceiling
Killing time while you sleep,
I could watch for hours
But you'll think I'm a freak.
Growing dread inside me
Makes it real hard to breathe,
What happens if you wake up
And see that I'm a...*

*I'm a fraud, I'm a liar,
I don't even exist.
An imposter, I'm a charlatan,
But I need to persist.
If I scream, you can't hear me
Under doors that don't squeak.
My existence is a joke -
Life without you is bleak.*

*Dawn is getting closer,
But you still look so dead.
I'm wondering if it's true
Or is it just in my head.
Thoughts racing make me dizzy,
And I nearly fall.
Your eyes are wide open,
But you see nothing at all.*

*I'm a fraud, I'm a liar,
I don't even exist.
An imposter, I'm a charlatan,
But I need to persist.
If I scream, you can't hear me
Under doors that don't squeak.
My existence is a joke -
Life without you is bleak.
My existence is a joke -
Life without you is bleak.*

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