

NON

STEEF KERSBERGEN

BECOMING MY NONBINARY BODY:

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF
IMAGINATIVE SELF-REPRESENTATION
THROUGH IMAGE MAKING**



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THROUGH IMAGE MAKING**

STEEF KERSBERGEN
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Steef Kersbergen to Master Performance Practices,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in
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PRACTICES**

2023

I live not in dreams but in contemplation of a reality
that is perhaps the future.

-Rainer Maria Rilke (1969)

"Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1892-1910", p.101.

SYNOPSIS

This dissertation examines the role of imagination through image-making in the creation of non-binary understandings of identity. Marginalized identities are often rendered invisible in society for they don't fit the frameworks of the normative gaze. The research is founded on an autobiographical practice of performance art and image-making as a way to explore and express my trans*nonbinary identity while waiting for medical transition. Through the creation of four performative events on the topic of nonbinary becoming, my research proposes tools of imagination and image-making to subvert the normative gaze and expectations, and become visible. Drawing inspiration from Feminist and Queer theories, combined with Speculative Philosophy and examples of visual artists working in self-portraiture, this dissertation unpacks the transformative potential of imagination in shaping one's perception of the world and oneself. It also delves into the complexities and risks associated with queer visibility in a heteronormative society and proposes a different mode of gazing to create space for the imagination to emerge.

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DECLARATION

I, Steef Kersbergen, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, 'BECOMING MY NONBINARY BODY: The Transformative Power of Imaginative Self-Representation through Image Making'

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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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The artistic research 'BECOMING MY NONBINARY BODY: The Transformative Power of Imaginative Self-Representation through Image Making', and the performances related to it, started from a very personal topic and in the writing of this thesis there is (inevitably) an intertwining of personal questions and considerations, findings through practice and theoretical discourse. Drawing upon my personal journey as a trans*nonbinary individual currently waiting for medical transition, this research emerged from realizing the erasure of my identity and present existence from various forms of media, such as books, movies, or documentaries about transgender experiences and even social media where trans*gender individuals document their journey. As with many gender non-conforming people who are not in medical transition (yet), society often misreads my identity as either feminine or masculine because society's dominant understanding of transgender identities is limited, whilst the gender binary is still omnipresent and difficult to escape from.

During my research, I have coined the term the invisible time referring to the distinct period between coming out and the social and medical transition. In the Netherlands, there

is currently a three-year waiting list for intake consultations for gender-affirming healthcare (Radboud UMC, 2023). Often, this waiting timeframe is erased from the media for it is not the most interesting or appealing period for dramatic storytelling, there are no major visible shifts or transformations. The biggest transformation taking place regards the internal shifts, the process of unlearning the conditioned gender and exploring identity through waiting. A journey of questioning and self-acceptance, of re-imagining a future (or often imagining the future for the first time). A journey of healing and grieving the time that was lost in pretending to be what society desired you to be. A journey of becoming home in the body and waiting for it to change. According to a study by SiMR on behalf of the Dutch government, in 2022 about seven thousand people were waiting for medical support (SiMR, 2022). These are the people that my work centers around. The ones who are waiting, exploring their agency in social transition, desiring this change to bring them home in their body, the ones who are unintelligible in society because most of their physical markers of identity project a message that does not align with who they are.

My attempt in this work is to contribute tools and approaches through the lenses of my personal experience that offer entry points in the visibility and intelligibility of aspects of the trans*nonbinary identities that so often society overlooks.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge the importance of intersectionality and positionality. While this research focuses on the invisibility of trans*nonbinary identities, since that is how I experience the invisible time, I recognize that many other phases or situations in a person's life could be labeled as invisible time. Being rendered invisible is not something exclusive to trans*nonbinary people or the trans* community. Unfortunately, many aspects of identities that do not fit the norm are erased. Other similar examples of invisible times could be young parenthood, where all eyes go to the baby whilst the young parent is rendered invisible, or invisible disabilities where society assumes one should fit within normative structures when they cannot, or trans*people who do not have any access to medical care and remain invisible for much longer periods. I approach the strategies I offer in the thesis through the ideas of intersectionality, acknowledging my own privileges and recognizing where oppressed identities can intersect and how that impacts the oppression. I speculate that these strategies of becoming visible could be applied in other situations of invisibility as well. In this research though, in favor of clarity and specificity, I focus only on the invisible time experienced by trans*nonbinary individuals in between social transition and medical transition. Also, please note that the experience of the invisible time is not the same for every trans* individual, not every trans*(nonbinary) person even desires medical transition. Gender identity can be expressed and experienced in many ways and not everyone has the desire for the three to coincide.

Furthermore, the research is situated in a specific time and location, rooted in the current state of Dutch politics, influenced mostly by the situation in the USA and the UK, where the conversation about trans* identities is more divided than ever. Trans* identities are under attack, with conservative activists declaring that 'transgenderism must be eradicated from society' (The Hill¹, 2023), the banning of gender-affirming health care in multiple states in the US (Movement Advancement Project, 2023), and the ban of drag shows in Tennessee (GenderGP, 2023). Forum voor Democratie, a Dutch conservative right-wing political party, is creating an image of the dangerous trans* person as a man dressed up as a woman attacking women in bathrooms or taking over women's sports (2022). These are harmful stereotypes that undermine the actual danger that is most often directed at trans* individuals (especially women) instead of originating from them. By reiterating the idea that genderqueer individuals are mentally ill and conflating gender and biological sex, fear based on confusion and misunderstanding is spread within the society, perpetuating, or justifying aggressions against the trans* community. In recent years we have seen a drastic rise in trans*phobic violence (Van Oosterhout, 2019) and now legislation is put in place to erase protection of trans* individuals. As a result, trans* identities are made to either be

¹ Disclaimer: by clicking the link associated with this reference you are financially supporting anti-trans* rhetoric.

invisible or demonized. Through this artistic research, I am attempting to counter both ideas by showing the vulnerable, gentle, beautiful, and soft aspects of trans* identities that get ignored so often. Subverting the aggressive discourse around trans* identities with a much gentler statement of showing identity and imagination through image making whilst exploring the complex of gazes to create space for the invisible.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main hypothesis that I am engaging with in this practice-led artistic research is that performance-based image-making on identity can act as a transformative tool of becoming visible in the invisible time.

Subquestions that emerged through working with this hypothesis and that I will be dealing with in the thesis are: What are the ethics of trans* nonbinary visibility? What are the risks and benefits of being visible as a trans* individual? And what does it mean to be visible to oneself? These topics around the ethics of visibility will be discussed in chapter 2, connecting them to Sara Ahmed, philosopher in the fields of feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory, through her *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), and to Judith Butler, philosopher, and gender theorist, through their writing *Gender Trouble* (2007).

In chapter 3, I engage with the topics of imagination and the shaping of reality. How are image-making and the imagination of the self related? And how can imagination be used as an active act of becoming through this time of invisibility? The main theories I use to approach these topics are Speculative philosophy (2009) by Donald Philip Venere, a philosopher dealing with imagination and the concept of Phantasia, taken from Giambattista Vico, combined with Cruising Utopia (2019) by José Esteban Muñoz, a scholar in the fields of queer theory, critical theory, and performance studies.

Chapter 4 deals with the practice of image making, investigating questions like: How does language impact the approach to image making and to seeing oneself? And what impact does a collaborative approach to image-making have on shaping and exploring identity? Mainly engaging with On photography (1978) by Susan Sontag, philosopher and political activist, and my proposal on collaborative strategies to create space for imagination. Continuing then regarding the creation of a nonbinary imaginary, colliding this research with practices of queer and feminist image-making by artists such as Claude Cahun and Nitzan Krimsky.

Lastly, chapter 5 delves into questions around the gaze, creating a historical and theoretical framework to understand the mechanisms of gazing, and exploring what kind of gaze could subvert a binary perspective. This chapter

predominantly revolves around my engagement with Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure (1975) by Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist, and my proposed type of gazing to uncover the invisible.

Throughout this thesis, I'll be unpacking and critically reflecting upon my research actions and findings, building a conversation between theoretical discourse and my practical experiences. I consider this artistic research to be practice-led, as it is grounded in the four performative events that I devised throughout the process, leading me to new questions and findings in each step. In this thesis, I will explore concepts in the same order as they emerged in my research, immediately connecting the theoretical frameworks to my practical experiences.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF PRACTICE'S LANDMARKS

The four performative events in this research were rooted in the same topic and (partially) used the same title 'BECOMING MY NONBINARY BODY'. In the thesis, I will refer more extensively to the process of creating the last iteration of the work which was an attempt to engage with all questions that arose in the previous three versions. To open up my practice in this writing I will first briefly explain what each iteration looked like and which topics were most important.

All of these works were based on the same performative concepts, such as temporality and slowness, multiplicity of the body, sculpting the body to become the authentic self, and intimacy between performer and audience. Each performance originated from my personal trajectory as a trans*nonbinary individual who is waiting for medical transition and engaged with the topic of waiting defined by a specific duration. The first piece (made in January 2022) had a duration of 2,5 hours. At that moment the waiting time for trans*gender healthcare in the Netherlands was 2,5 years, from the second piece onwards the duration of each work was extended to 3 hours because the waiting time had extended to be 3 years.

The first iteration of the work (Kersbergen, 2022) dealt with slowness and daily modes of transition by continuously moving through a slow-motion transition for 2,5 hours, using everyday objects like make-up, clothing, and trans*tape (tape to bind the chest flat to the body) to transform the body. The body was multiplied by a live-projection feed that was placed in the background of the performance, also covering the performer's body, creating a portal-like environment as if the audience was invited to escape the gender binary together with the performance. Questions raised in this performance mostly concerned projections of ideas onto the body, how is the body being perceived and what meaning is given to that perception. What does it mean to be seen and so to be

visible? I attempted to extend the judgment of what the body is and create space for the imagination of what the body could become. One of the main operations used was the reciprocity of the gaze, where the audience was being looked at while looking at the body of the performer, creating in this way a great deal of intimacy and a feeling of shared imagination.

The second iteration of the work (Kersbergen, 2023) was centered around the act of waiting and the invisible transformation that happens there. The performer was blindfolded and sat in complete stillness for three hours while whispering a stream of non-stop speech production on the topic of waiting. Through these whispers expressing dreams, desires, fears, questions, and any transition-related considerations. Behind the performer were large-scale projections of a dream-like sculpting of the body by using clay, literally molding the body to be different while the present body of the performer seemingly did not move at all. Through the operation of whispering the audience was invited to come close to the performer to hear the text, creating a sense of intimacy by physical proximity. Many of the considerations had to do with the uncertainty of this waiting time and not being able to have a clear vision of the future yet, relating to the blindfold the performer was wearing. This work raised questions around the possibility of sharing imaginations, how imagining impacts the present and future reality, invisible transformations, and taking up space.

The third iteration (Kersbergen, 2023) was a performative experiment on naming, re-naming, and reclaiming my name. It was originally performed without an audience, just as a performance for camera, and the created material has been used in a short video work². In this experiment, the focus was placed on the sculpting of the body through the use of plastic and the chosen name (the name trans*individuals choose for themselves to accurately represent them, changing the name given to them at birth). Wrapping the body in plastic wrap, and repeatedly writing the name in the place where future top-surgery (removing excess breast tissue) scars might appear. In this way claiming those scars as one's own and one's future. Raising questions around images that show an imagined future, of ownership and agency over those images and the body, and crucially, questions surrounding the creation of those images in a collaborative, feminist modality.

All of these performative events and experiments lead to the fourth iteration of BECOMING MY NONBINARY BODY which is the performance this thesis mainly focuses on. This work was titled 'Becoming my nonbinary body: NOTES FROM INSIDE THE COCOON' (Kersbergen, 2023) and was an attempt to combine my previous findings and considerations into one performance. This time the work focussed on the internal transition that occurs through (re-)imagining oneself

² <https://steefkensbergen.wixsite.com/home/about-3>

within the process of waiting for medical transition. The performance was built upon the metaphor of the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly which is often used to explain the trans* experience. The body of the performer was wrapped in a see-through cocoon of plastic foil, then suspended in a silk cocoon roughly 1.70m above the ground, and around it, there were large-scale projections of imagined future transitions (see fig. 1 and 2). The performance was a translation of the overly simplified metaphor that holds some beautiful potential when it is unpacked. At first glance the metaphor is a linear story of becoming your true self, becoming beautiful, and finding freedom, which is of course can be considered a too simplistic narrative to explain any human life. The journey of transition is not nearly as neatly linear as suggested by this metaphor and has quite little to do with becoming beautiful. From my perspective, the relevant part of the metaphor is the cocoon itself because it touches both on the difficult parts of waiting and invisibility as well as on the joyful parts of imagination and becoming your authentic self. When I use the word authentic concerning representation of the self I refer to a state of being true to oneself and aligned with one's inner sense of identity. A state where a trans* individual embraces their gender identity and takes steps to align their external presentation and physical body with their internal sense of self. The suggestion made through the performance is that a trans*nonbinary person does not start their transition (their cocooning phase) the moment they start medical

Figure 1. Kotsopoulou, F. (2023). Image from performance.
Performer's body wrapped in plastic and suspended in silk.



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transition, but the moment they start internally transitioning, because also in the waiting for medical transition many shifts and transformations take place. The caterpillar goes into the cocoon and its body gets taken away from the view of the spectator, it goes through the transition alone, and without being seen. This is a narrative that unfortunately is relatable for trans*individuals but can also be problematic if perpetuated. It upholds the idea that transition should be done solitary and away from sight as if it is something that should not be shared or seen. To address this I decided to create a space of collective cocooning where the audience is invited into the cocoon together with the performer. The performance then focussed on the act of imagining as an active operation of becoming within the cocoon. Caterpillars completely dissolve inside the cocoon, they digest themselves to rebuild the body with the nutrients. There is no recognizable animal inside the cocoon for a while. The only thing that remains from the body of the caterpillar are the so-called imaginal disks, small clumps of cells that hold the DNA of the butterfly body. These are the cells that can imagine the future body of the caterpillar, and so the power of the imagination is crucial in the transformative process inside the cocoon. The butterfly still is made of the same matter as the caterpillar, but it looks nothing like the animal from before. You cannot trace back the legs, or eyes to the ones there previously, but this transformed body was imagined in detail all along. This element was brought to the performance by projecting

images of imagined futures and dreams around the physical cocoon that was present in space. In this way also suggesting that there are multiple layers of cocoon happening at the same time. The space became a cocoon, the silk that the performer sat inside, the plastic that the body was wrapped in, and the skin of the performer itself. Imagination was happening at every layer of the cocoon, within the space there was a shared imagination with the audience, and within each person was their private imagination. The performance showed a part of the time spent inside the cocoon, not the full transition, so there was no 'end result' and no getting out of the cocoon. The performance lasted for three hours in which the performer slowly moved through different positions of waiting and finding comfort within the layers of the cocoon, establishing eye contact with the audience and collectively re-imagining the future body. Attempting to make visible what usually remains out of sight or hidden.

Figure 2. Kotsopoulou, F. (2023). Image from performance.
Performers body suspended with projected image in background.



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CHAPTER 2: THE ETHICS OF VISIBILITY: THE SAFETY OF INVISIBILITY AND DANGERS OF BEING VISIBLE

My endeavor into this research started with the desire for my trans*nonbinary identity to be visible and legible in my art because I saw my identity so often being erased. This led me to the topic of visibility and invisibility, which I will unpack in this chapter.

2.1 QUEER VISIBILITY

The history of Western European and North American queer visibility is complex and evolving, shaped by political changes, societal attitudes, and cultural norms. Over different times in history, queerness, non-normative sexualities, and non-binary and trans*gender identities were suppressed, marginalized, or criminalized, leading to invisibility and erasure. For this reason, various moments of queer movements were focused on the visibility of queer identities to improve the social and political status of queer individuals and communities. To be able and allowed to be seen for who one is, without fear of repercussions, has been, and still is, the biggest aim of the queer rights movements. From being allowed to be visibly gay or trans* in the public sphere, to having the same rights

as cisgender, heterosexual citizens. From being safe to be oneself in schools to public bathrooms, and from being allowed to marry the person you love to having access to healthcare. It all relates to being allowed to be yourself and be seen as such. Some famous queer liberation slogans also resemble this fight for visibility, such as: "We're here, we're queer", "We won't be erased" and "Queer visibility, queer resistance". And even though queer visibility has increased drastically in the USA and Western Europe, the struggle is still going on.

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) Sara Ahmed argues that one becomes racialized by inhabiting space. Stating that whiteness is the invisible and unmarked, absent center that all others are measured to. Ahmed argues that whiteness is a 'straightening device' (p.121) a normative framework that 'straightens' or aligns various aspects of identity to societal norm, ostracizing the ones that are unable to pass within that norm. In doing so, Ahmed highlights how the privileged position of whiteness is connected to the reinforcement of heterosexual norms and so the heterosexual expectation, in this way marginalizing and erasing non-normative identities.

(...) "nonwhite bodies do inhabit white spaces. Such bodies are made invisible when we see spaces as being white, at the same time they become hyper-visible when they do not pass, which means they "stand out" and "stand apart" like the black sheep in the family. You learn to fade into the background, but sometimes you cannot. The moment when the body appears "out of place" are moments of political and personal trouble" (Ahmed, 2006, 135).

What Ahmed argues here can be interpreted as stating that we view the world around us and the people in it through lenses of expectations that are informed by societal norms, usually upholding racialization. Similar statements can be made for queerness and the upholding of heterosexuality. We are conditioned to assume everyone to be cis-gender and heterosexual until proven otherwise, spaces and legal structures are designed for cis-straight individuals, and traditional romantic media center heterosexual storylines. Ahmed argues that spaces extend certain lines of expectations, like whiteness, heterosexuality, and cis-gender identity, and not conforming to those expectations makes the body seem out of place (2006, 135). Most spaces are still upholding the lines of expected heterosexuality, and so queer individuals who inhabit those spaces are rendered invisible when they are seen as being heterosexual (and cisgender). Only once they break the expectation (by coming out, public display of affection, or otherwise being visibly queer) do they step out of the line of heterosexuality and become 'hypervisible', they stand out and no longer 'pass' within the norm (Ahmed, 2006, 135). This can cause many uncomfortable situations for the queer individual in question. Hypervisibility of non-normative identities causes disorientation, Ahmed argues, people get treated differently, get stared at, or even harassed to try and restore the order of the straight line (2006, 137). She calls this "affective economies" (Ahmed, 2006, 129), the system that regulates and shapes the visibility of different bodies,

where the ones conforming to normative expectations are rewarded with affect, value, and acceptance, while those that deviate are met with discomfort, rejection, or violence. Judith Butler describes this rejection of the deviant in their work *Gender Trouble* (2007, 34-46) where they examine the performative nature of gender and the policing of identities that are 'not performed correctly'. Stating that one remains invisible as long as they perform their identity correctly according to the heterosexual norm, and once they become illegible to this norm, and thus become visible, they will be punished for their 'incorrect gender performance'. These punishments we see happening around us all the time when queer people are 'corrected' in their expression. Effeminate boys are told to 'man up', and tough girls are ordered to be more 'ladylike'. These 'corrections' later turn into aggressions such as homophobic hate-speech or violence against queer-presenting people.

If this is the case, then why would anyone want to be visible in their deviation from the norm? While society often rewards bodies that conform to established standards due to normative expectations, individuals who do not conform to these norms still often desire visibility. Visibility can be a source of validation, recognition, and social connection. Even if one's identity, or body, is judged as out of the norm, or marginalized, the human desire to be seen, heard, and be acknowledged for who you are, nurtures the desire to be visible.

Being visible can also be an act of challenging and disrupting dominant narratives and norms with potential transformative power. By being 'out of line', as Ahmed describes it (2006, 146), people inhabiting non-normative identities can assert their presence and make marginalized identities visible as a whole. Thus, engaging in acts of resistance and contributing to social change. In this way, I consider the performances within this research to be gentle acts of resistance, as they actively seek to make the non-normative identity visible for a duration of three hours, opening up the possibility of changing people's perceptions and convictions around trans*nonbinary identities outside of the performances as well.

2.2 SEEING THE INVISIBLE

The research deals with invisibility on two levels. Firstly it deals with the invisibility of nonbinary identities. Binary thinking is deeply embedded in Western society and it has conditioned both our perception and way of thinking. Upon meeting a new person our brains automatically place them in multiple categories, such as race, age, and gender. Of course, one can change their perception of others upon critically examining this unconscious bias, but it is nearly impossible to completely avoid making them in the first instance. This way nonbinary people are always read as men or women until they state differently, and this becoming visible is not without risk.

People have been so conditioned into believing the status quo that any slight attempt to break free from it brings panic and rage. They think that we are selfish when actually we are imagining a more kind and just world for everyone (Vaid-Menon, 2020,32).

This panic and rage regularly result in an aggressive stance towards the gender non-conforming individual causing fear of expressing oneself. Another instance when binary thinking incidentally erases the nonbinary identities is when people assume they know what a transition will entail without asking, placing the nonbinary individual back into binary thinking by assuming a transition is a binary experience of 'all or nothing'. So by just stating the nonbinary identity in the title of the performances and showing the body both as it is right now and as it is imagined outside of the binary gender norms, the performances claim space for the nonbinary identity to be seen.

Secondly, the research deals with the invisibility of the internal transition that happens during the time of waiting for medical transition. A time that is lived often quietly and without being public about the waiting, for it is an uncomfortable time yet it is hopeful. The performance 'Becoming my nonbinary body: NOTES FROM INSIDE THE COCOON' (Kersbergen, 2023) was an attempt to show the waiting time in its complexity. By using the duration of three hours without a big dramaturgical

shift or transformation it showed and made possible to feel the frustration of waiting for a long time, while at the same time, through that investment of time also the perception of what is there and what is happening grows and becomes more intimate and intense. The audience is invited to look for a longer time at both the present body and the imagined ones, and this duration of looking makes space for the things remaining invisible in the speed of everyday life. Suddenly, the small transitions in body language and shifts in posture become visible, and through the intimacy of the prolonged gazing an aspect of self-perfection becomes tangible. In the space between the audience and the performer, imagination thrives and opens the possibility to see more than what is there in the moment.

CHAPTER 3: FANTASIA AND THE CREATION OF NEW REALITIES

Through the process of making the performances I came to find the importance of imagination and the opportunities it provides in the attempt to become visible. This chapter is dedicated to unpacking some theories on imagination and futurity.

3.1 FANTASIA AND IMAGE-MAKING

In *Speculative Philosophy* (2009, 92-96) Donald Philip Verene, professor of Philosophy and editor of *New Vico Studies*, reaches back to Giambattista Vico's ideas on Fantasia, and explains it as: making imagination; imagination as an active formation of reality. Verene argues that the power of fantasia is that it does not re-present nor adapt a pre-given subject, but instead, the imagined is the given. The creative power of fantasia creates something utterly new, not merely an adaptation of so-called 'reality'. (like in poetry or art he argues)

It is not novelty, in the sense of creating something new from a present reality that could not be expected on the basis of what is given in that reality. It is the making of reality itself. Reality is not being extended or newly viewed or remade. Reality is itself being made. The fundamental work of fantasia is the active formation of reality (Verene, 2009, 94).

Verene goes on to argue that fantasia is a part of the system

of memory, which has three elements to it; remembering, imagining, and inventing (2009, 95). I align myself with Verene's perspective and I would continue the line of thought. If fantasia means making imagination, as an active formation of reality instead of merely adapting a previously known object or concept, because it is not an imagining of something that exists but creating a new understanding of reality, and therefore creating a new reality, I interpret that as the creational power of imagination. In my artistic practice, I refer to imagination as an active tool in becoming. Through imagination one can shift their understanding of the world or themselves. By imagining my body in its possible future version that does not exist yet physically, I start shifting my understanding of that body in its current physical state. Because in my mind's eye, I can see the possibilities of becoming that which my body holds but remains invisible in everyday life. By then making these imaginations into visual (moving) images, I have created a new reality. For now, my desired future is visible outside of my imagination and shareable with others.

We live in a society where the majority holds on the assumption that something needs to be visible and documented for it to be real ('pictures otherwise it did not happen' is the current vernacular). Although this is starting to shift due to the enormous influence of editing software and now AI-generated imagery. This need for proof through documentation has

always prevented me from seeing my future body as a real possibility for I could never see or document it. Through this process of creating images from my imagined reality, I start to see a body that does not yet exist as real. Even though this body in the image is not physically present yet, it did in some way happen for it is visible and sharable, in the image.

The next step is then to share the images, letting other people see them as well, and so let the images affect their imagination of my trans*nonbinary identity. In this way, I make something visible, stepping out of the invisible time for a fleeting moment.

I see an almost circular power to the imaginary forces as a sign that imagination is an active tool for creating reality. I'll explain this through the concept of speech acts that Judith Butler discusses in *Excitable Speech* (1997). They state that the language we use to describe another person holds the power to shape our social reality, and often carries violence (1997, p.68). The language we operate informs the way we conceptualize the person or the identity we speak about. I recognize this mechanism in the way queer identities are portrayed by right-wing conservatives, media, or capitalist rainbow-washing of ad campaigns. This time not through language, but through the literal and metaphorical images which are created. I would call this mechanism imaginative acts. These images inform (often in a violent way) how society

conceptualizes queer identities. Through my practice, I offer my images to the audience as an alternative to challenge their conceptualization of queer identities. Starting from my imagination (mental image-making), I create a different understanding and potential future vision for myself, turning that into visual image-making, re-presenting that imagination to be shared. Through sharing, I am showing both to me and to the spectators the transformative power of the body and aspects of identity that are often invisible. By being seen and experienced in the performance, the images offer the spectators the possibility to, (un)consciously, adapt their imagination of my nonbinary identity. Remembering it in times I cannot predict, connected to experiences I have no knowledge about at all, possibly seeing my identity in more places than I am in, and therefore, making the invisible time a bit more tangible.

3.2 THE CREATIVE POWER OF IMAGINATION

More recent theorists have also been engaging with the concept of future-making through imagination; José Esteban Muñoz did so quite explicitly in *Cruising Utopia* (2019). Muñoz believes that imagination is crucial and powerful for envisioning a better future and bringing about social and cultural change. Imagination brings people the opportunity to break free from the confines of the present moment and to imagine alternative possibilities, ways of existing, and

ultimately different worlds. Muñoz emphasizes that the act of imagining queer futures is not a passive act or one to escape reality, but an active one with great transformative power. It involves actively dreaming up and creating new realities, desires, and modes of existence that challenge dominant norms and structures (2019, 56). Imagination is a way of disrupting the limitations imposed by the present reality by opening up spaces for envisioning diverse ways of living, desiring, and relating. It allows individuals to dream, to visualize possibilities that may seem impossible or unimaginable within the confines of the existing social order.

Through the example of activist manifestos imagining new futures, Muñoz (2009, 19-26) highlights the power of collective imagination in the context of queer and other marginalized communities. He poses the collective imagination as a tool for community building, resistance to social norms and oppressive structures, and mobilizing towards a shared vision of a more inclusive and just future. In essence, Muñoz calls for a queer futurity that represents a radical reimagining of the future, one where the potential of queerness is embraced in order to create new ways of being and living beyond the limitations of the current social order (2009, 26).

In the work *'Becoming my nonbinary body: NOTES FROM INSIDE THE COCOON'* (Kersbergen, 2023) multiple strategies were used to get to a place of collective imagination. By

projecting imagined futures, some more realistic and others more surrealistic, in large scale and slow tempo, the audience was invited to witness these imaginations and create their own by drawing inspiration from them. The work did not yet venture into the active creation of new realities but made a first move in that direction by sharing the imaginations to come to a possible collective, multifaceted one.

In the process of creating the performance, I have performed multiple actions for the camera trying to manipulate the body to present a different, possibly future, reality. A reality that merely exists in my imagination. These imaginations have been transformed into physical actions of transforming the body, like applying a flower beard, contorting my body with my hands, dancing in a dress and a realistic-looking beard, wrapping the body in plastic, or sculpting the body with clay. These imaginative actions were then recorded in different locations, to resemble the more internal world or the external world. Some images were situated in a physical location, like outside in nature, or public space on a staircase, whereas other images were more abstract in their location by just showing the body with a black background or in a dreamlike hallucinative environment of spirals. To escape the narrative mode of thinking, the images are edited in a non-linear order and glitched in various ways. The glitching literally breaks the images and opens up gaps where the imagination can emerge. These images of the imaginative actions built the

environment that the live performance takes place in and interacts with. I fully acknowledge that these images contain manipulations of the body, I know it is not 'real' and I know what my body looks like 'underneath' the action, and this is also clear to the audience. But still, the images reflect a certain authenticity of the body that is invisible in everyday life at this point in time. So, looking back to the images that have been created in collaboration during the performative action, and so generously documented by my collaborator handling the camera, I feel shocked. My body looks different than I thought or than I know it looks like, and suddenly I can see a potential future reality. My imaginations of what my future body can look like have materialized in the present moment and are visible not only in my mind's eye but also to someone else, and I can point at something tangible to explain my identity in a way that is not always accessible through language. Especially since language is so entangled with the gender binary, explaining my experience outside of the binary using the vocabulary from within it is very hard.

These images are then shared in a stream of video (like a stream of consciousness) through the 3-hour duration of the performance. Combined intuitively instead of narratively, urging the audience to step out of narrative-based meaning making and to go into their imaginations and associations to give meaning to the images they're presented with.

CHAPTER 4: IMAGE MAKING AND THE SHIFTING UNDERSTANDING OF IDENTITY

Before any of these images can be perceived or shared with audience members for the imagination to happen, they have to be created first. This chapter unpacks some theories around image making and offers strategies for a feminist approach.

4.1 FEMINIST LANGUAGE IN IMAGE MAKING

In *On Photography* (1973, 14), Sontag writes about how taking someone's picture is a violent act, making of them an object that can be manipulated, owned, or changed without their consent. By taking someone's picture you create an image of someone they are unable to perceive themselves. She states that image making is used as a tool for 'gaining control over the subject' (1973, 64) by shaping its presentation through multiple variables such as lens, perspective, lighting, angle, and exposure, and can be harmful, stigmatizing, denigrating, objectifying, fetishizing or otherwise undesirable.

In current photography practices, these ideas are generally acknowledged, and I recognize them in many aspects around image making and can be linked to issues dealing

with agency or ownership over the image, capitalization of images, and questions around archiving. In Regarding the pain of others Sontag continues her writing on photography and relates pointing a camera at someone to pointing a gun at someone (2003, 48). This opened up the conversation about the aggressive, oppressive, and possessive language around photography. To take someone's picture, claiming a sense of ownership over the image of another, as if it is a commodity for the photographer to take. To capture someone's image, implying that the other is something to catch and control. To aim and shoot, directly link the act of taking someone's picture to the action of firing a weapon. Continuing to more colloquial language around photography like; *to shoot from the hip*, indicating that one takes a picture quickly and without too much eye for composition, relating the act to impulsively and quickly firing a gun. Going all the way to terms directly taken from warfare like the sniper shot, implying an almost invisible approach to photography where one takes photos without the subject noticing to create candid images. These are all examples of language that holds aggressive energy, claiming a sense of ownership and agency over the subject through the camera, converting the person in front of the camera into an object that can be possessed.

Foucault's writing on power and discourse is one entry into a conversation on why this language matters. Particularly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault explains

how language and knowledge are intertwined, shaping our understanding of the world and consequently our behavior. He argues that power operates through language and the ways we use it in discourse, regulating and normalizing certain ways of thinking and acting. Judith Butler discusses the topic of language similarly in their book *Excitable Speech* where they argue that the way people use language through speech is not merely about conveying information but also has the power to shape and construct social realities. As they state : "*speech does not merely reflect a relation of social domination; speech enacts domination, becoming the vehicle through which that social structure is reinstated*" (1997, 18).

So if the language we use shapes the social reality of our actions, how does this aggressive language around photography affect the practice of image-making? Throughout this research I decided to adopt a different vocabulary around image making to see how it would impact my practice, actively questioning the language I use to describe my actions to see how the vocabulary fits my feminist approach to the practice. "Feminists have argued that the only way to achieve this [the creation of a new linguistic reality more congenial to women] is for women to create their own language, either by redefining terms already in use, or by inventing a new language, with new words and new rules" (Saul, 2022) In an attempt to create a safe and nurturing practice that holds space for trans*nonbinary identities to become visible, I

chose to avoid terms that hold aggressive connotations, explicitly masculine identities, or reference to warfare, and to only use the term: image making (also referring to video making), and stating that this is a collaborative practice between the person handling the camera, the person in front of the camera, and the camera itself. Each part of this collaboration has its agency and responsibility in the process of image-making.

The person handling the camera is not taking my picture, but instead is gifting me an image of the body I imagine myself to have in the future, but that is invisible in the present moment. We have co-created an image, within the so-called 'real world', of a body that does not exist yet, but simultaneously has been present for it has been documented. I use co-created instead of captured, claiming that the imagination is not a static object to be caught and concealed but remains ever-shifting and changing, ever becoming. So the images created serve as a re-presentation of the imagined body at that specific moment, while still allowing the imagination the possibility of continuous growth and evolution.

The created images function as a confirmation to me that this body can actually exist at some point, in a more material way than it does right now (only in my imagined reality). They become an external validation of my identity as a trans* nonbinary person, through the fact that people have the

opportunity to glimpse intimate parts of my identity, even at this time when my body does not authentically reflect me.

These images are created through extensive conversation first to create a shared imagination. In these conversations I try to explain my imaginations to my collaborator, focussing on the way I imagine my body to be and the physical and emotional sensations that go along with that. We discuss what kind of image we're both envisioning and how to represent our imaginations and then I place my trust in their understanding of my imagination. It is important that I deeply trust them in this process so they can take responsibility for their part in the collaboration and I can focus on mine.

4.2 NONBINARY IMAGES

In the reviewing of the images created in my practice, I will bring in two other artists who work in similar ways on the topic of queer identity and self-representation to put my images in perspective, both historically and content related.

Firstly, Claude Cahun (1894-1954), a French visual artist and author, famous for their image-making subverting gender norms. They were a surrealist artist, queer, Jewish, and politically inclined with far-left ideas. Cahun (born Lucy Schwob) defied societal expectations and pushed the boundaries of gender expression during a time when gender

roles were established firmly in every part of life. One of the most prominent ways Cahun subverted gender norms in their art was through self-portraiture, which they created in close collaboration with their partner Marcel Moore. Both Cahun and Moore adopted masculine names during their life and created images defying the strict gender norms of the time. Using androgyny, the adaptation of personas, costumes, make-up, and poses, they intentionally presented themselves in ways that challenged conventional ideas of gender. For them, and likeminded surrealists of the time, political art was about disrupting the notions of reality as it was constructed in bourgeois society, so they use unexpected juxtapositions, the unconscious, and political desire to create their images. Gen Doy describes the work of Claude Cahun as follows:

the photographic and literary work of Cahun in collaboration with Moore similarly mixes the 'facts' of the self with 'fictions' of the self, woven together as if in a patchwork quilt but also fixed at some points where a needle pierces the fabric, where ideas and material reality come together (2006, 74).

Cahun's work becomes 'dreamlike' through this mixing of realness and fiction, conscious and unconscious, and by using uncanniness to subvert norms. They often work with masks, veils, and face paint, obscuring the face from sight of the audience, to open up interpretations of their identity. They used symbolism, theatrical elements, and imaginary creations to give a sense of otherworldliness and challenge conventional understandings of reality. Shortly put, Cahun's photographs crafted visual narratives that merged fantasy

and present reality, inviting the viewers to engage with their imaginations and to question the boundaries of what is possible (see fig. 3).

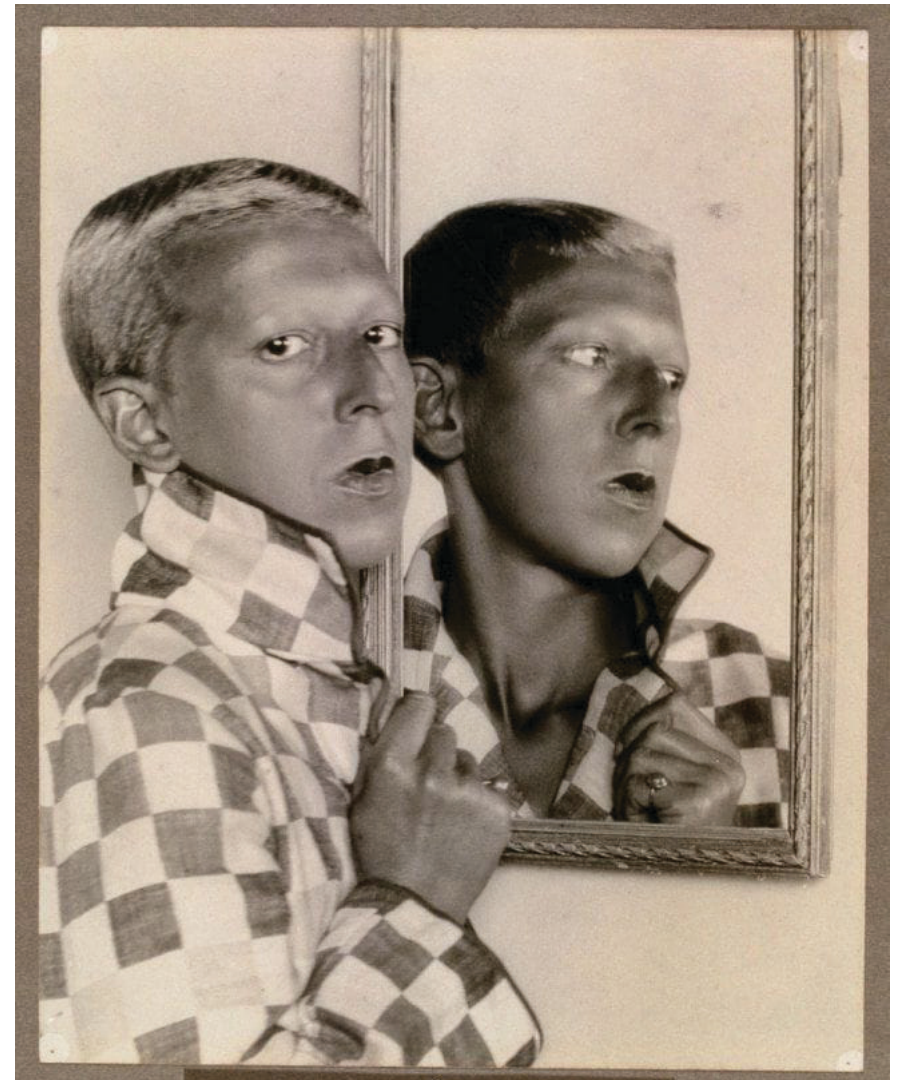


Figure 3. Cahun, C. (1927). Self-portrait (reflected image in mirror with chequered jacket)

Figure 4. Kersbergen, S. & Maier, V. (2023) Flower dreams. Image created for performance



In Cahuns work I found an entry-point into surrealist aspects of self-portraiture and the use of dreams and imaginations to show authentic perceptions of the self. This led me to use more surrealist elements in my images, for example, the beard made of flower petals (see fig. 4), not to try and represent a realist view of my identity, but to signify a dreamlike, joyful exploration of gender, in similarity to how Cahun uses extravagant make-up elements and costumes in their self-portraits.

Another more contemporary artist working with self-portraiture and documenting their experiments in gender identity is Nitzan Krinsky, a trans* photographer from Israel, currently situated in New York. They built a practice of self-documentation of over 20 years in which they documented their transition through self-portraiture and intimate personal writings. Part of this practice is presented in the book *BOI: song of a wanderer* (Borsboom, 2014), documenting 10 years of their journey into Boi-hood.

I always wanted a mustache, a flat chest and some muscles. I don't want my voice to change or hair to grow all over me. I look closer to a boy than a man, keeping a lot of the female characteristics, just like a teenage boy, but not a real one. That's why I call myself a BOI (2014, no page numbers).

They explicitly state themselves to be trans* nonbinary in their writing and they embody this in their images. Krinsky's self-portraits embrace raw and vulnerable aesthetics (see fig. 5), alternating very posed images to pictures seemingly

from everyday life, taken without much consideration of composition, creating a focus on the nuances of their own lived experiences.



Figure 5. Krimsky, N. (2008). Untitled self-portrait. Published in *Boi: Song of a wanderer*.

What initially drew me to the work of Krimsky was the fact that they did portray the invisible time. Within the book, there are images from before transition and even before realizing they are trans*, all the way through to after undergoing medical interventions to align their body with their identity. Their work blends the imaginative exploration of “what could be” with the embrace of their present reality at each given moment. Through elements such as drag, suggestive images in underwear that hint at their desired physicality, or depictions of a bound chest, they navigate the complexities of their journey. The temporal dimension of their work, unfolding over a period of 10 years, serves as a powerful reminder that trans*nonbinary individuals are not ‘a new trend’, but rather intricately layered people striving to live authentic lives. Their images showed me something that I had not seen much before, or maybe it was in the space between the images and how they had come together in the book, opening a place for me as a reader to dream along with them. The story was not solely focused on the hardship of being trans* but instead was a hopeful journey through the exploration of identity. This approach resonated with the ambition in my practice to depict the nonbinary identity in a way that is not focused on trauma, but instead emphasizes the power of imagination and desire through the journey of becoming. Drawing inspiration from their intimate approach to image creation, characterized by its proximity to the skin and unpolished aesthetics, I started working with close-ups

Figure 6. Kersbergen, S. (2023) Untitled self-portrait. Image created for performance.



of the body and the face in moments charged with emotion, 'taking away the masks' and showing the emotional journey underneath (see fig. 6).

The images I created in the process of this research could be placed somewhere in between the works of Cahun and Krimsky. There is often a use of gender-bending through costumes, make-up, and other materials, which I called the sculpting of the body, depicting a desired future. These desired futures are not always realistic or naturalistic in style but border on the surrealist by the use of for example flowers for a beard, or glitter as scars, but I would not go as far as equating those modifications of the body and face to the use of masks present in Cahun's work. Where in Cahun's photographs the mask or the veil is often used to obscure the face or cover part of the identity, the sculpting of the body and the face in the frame of my practice-led research are tools to uncover the identity and the imagination of the self.

4.3 THE INVISIBLE BETWEEN THE VISIBLE

During the last phase of this research, I started to question whether the invisible time is actually made visible or merely gestured towards, hinted at, or sparked in the imagination of the audience. Do the images I created actually depict anything of the desire, imagination, or identity that I embody and employed in the process of creating? Or do they suggest

desire, imagination, and identity without showing them in a way that can be pointed at clearly and stated: 'This is what it is'?

That is when I returned to Cahun and Krimsky and what their work shows me, and I found the beauty of visual works, for they provide more than just an image and cannot be fully encompassed or explained by words. Both the surrealist approach and the self-documentary style compiling of images provide the viewer with glimpses of imagined different selves but they cannot be pinned down to be one thing. The way they are brought together is what guides viewers into the meaning that lies between the images, the meaning in the gaps on the pages, or as it emerged in this research, the meaning in the editing and glitching of the images (see fig. 7). The combination of depicted dreams, the present body, the emotional intimacy, and the body in transformation create gaps in between where the imagination of the spectators is provoked. The images provide a spark of imagination through their suggestive and dreamlike nature, and the invisible time becomes tangible in the gaps between the images through the act of imagining together. By looking at the images and the gaps between them, the invisible time is brought to life within the viewer's mind, becoming imagined and so visible.



**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**



Figure 7. Kotsopoulou, F. (2023) Image from performance. Performer's body suspended with glitched image in background.

CHAPTER 5: THE DYNAMICS OF THE GAZE: POWER, AGENCY, AND VISUAL CULTURE

For the audience to engage with this imaginative process, it is crucial that the work is seen, observed, and actively gazed upon. This brings us back to a concept tightly related to visibility; to be visible one needs to be seen. The concept of the gaze is paramount in this research, as the invisible time emerges through the audience's imagination. Therefore, how the gaze is employed becomes crucial in the successful unfolding of this process.

5.1 THE GAZE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The gaze is a topic that is much discussed in film and media studies and is deeply interwoven with the idea of (in) visibility. To be visible implies the need to be seen and thus to engage with certain gazes. The most well-known example of a specific gaze is the *male gaze*, first introduced by Laura Mulvey, renowned feminist film theorist and cultural critic, in her fundamental writing *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). Mulvey introduces the concept, explaining it as the dominant perspective through which the camera is operated, and the narrative is structured so that viewers will identify themselves with the heterosexual male protagonist.

While at the same time, the women side characters are more typically portrayed as passive objects of desire, with their main reason for existing within the plot for the pleasure of the male characters and the male audience. This type of representation perpetuates the patriarchal system in which women are objectified and denied agency whilst “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed” (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey goes on to unpack the way women are looked at in these films by distinguishing the gaze from the male protagonist onto the female heroine and the gaze from the audience. She explains that both of those gazes are filled with *scopophilia*, the pleasure of looking at other people as objects. The audience is identifying with the main male protagonist as their ‘screen surrogate’ who has the active power within the narrative controlling the events, which coincides with the active power of the erotic looking at, providing the audience with a sense of power like the male protagonist has. This mechanism enforces the idea that the male gaze becomes an active looking while the female icon becomes a passive displaying. In her later writing she continues to state that even the female spectator participates in this masculine gazing through ‘trans-sex identification’, identifying with the male protagonist and in this way also consuming the image of the passive female character for erotic pleasure, so participating in the male gaze (Mulvey, 1981, 14).

Of course, we have to take into consideration the time she was writing these texts, concerning the Hollywood films that were created then. Mulvey’s writing is critiqued for its sense of essentialism suggesting that the female body has a set of attributes that define its identity and role, inherently different from masculinity, and for only addressing the heterosexual male protagonist and spectator (Laing and Willson, 2022). From these points of critique, many scholars have described different gazes that can emerge or actively be assumed in different situations. An important one is Teresa de Lauretis, who brings the idea of the Female gaze in her writing *Alice Doesn’t* (1984), where she starts with the statement: “the present task of women’s cinema may be not the destruction of narrative and visual pleasure, but rather the construction of another frame of reference, one in which the measure of desire is no longer just the male subject” (p.8). This instruction to create another frame of reference can be taken into many different identity groups, and one of the first responses to it was what can be described as the ‘Gay gaze’ like in Richard Dyer’s writing *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) in which he describes how gay men identified with certain female protagonists in films and celebrity icons, identifying with them instead of objectifying them through their gaze. Dyer argues that the gay gaze is not solely situated in the sexual orientation of the spectator but is shaped by shared cultural and historical references within communities of gaymen (1986, 153). The gay gaze is not a fixed or singular perspective but instead rooted

in subversive or camp interpretations of mainstream culture, relying on a strong awareness of codes, subtext, and hidden meanings, allowing gay audiences to find a queer meaning. A switch has been made here from an erotic, consumptive, controlling type of gaze to one of identification (with the subject of desire), celebration, and queer interpretation.

Since then many types of gazes have been described and distinguished, some very specifically related to the way someone goes about the act of looking, such as the hunter's gaze or the vegan gaze, others more invested in the lens one looks through, like the colonial gaze, the post-colonial gaze, or the feminist gaze.

Previously I stated that being visible is an act of resistance and that my performances are therefore gentle acts of resistance. Through the performative works, I challenge not only *if* the body is seen, but also *how* it is seen, how it is gazed at. Questioning what gaze creates space for the imagination to emerge.

5.2 THE IMAGINATIVE GAZE

Firstly I would suggest the Dreamer's gaze, relating to the topic of imagination and imagining new realities. The Dreamer's gaze would be characterized by looking through the lens of imagination. It involves recognizing and appreciating the

power of imagination not only in oneself but also in others. The Dreamer's gaze encourages blurring the boundaries between imagination and reality, emphasizing the exploration of new possibilities, and the questioning of established conventions. It is a gaze filled with hope, inspiration, and a belief that dreams and imagination can be transformed into tangible realities. By repeatedly dreaming and actively engaging in imagination, the Dreamer's gaze suggests that we can bring our imaginations to life and enact them in the world.

Secondly, I would bring in the Curious gaze, to open up the spectator to experiences they have not lived themselves and learn from others. The Curious gaze is driven by a sense of inquiry and wonder. Curiosity includes a desire to see, something that is not a given when trans* identities are the object to be looked at. In our current societal state, trans* identities are often demonized and treated with abjection. 'Don't ask, don't tell' is still widespread practice, just like the phrase 'it's all fine as long as I don't have to see it'. The Curious gaze is an open and receptive attitude that seeks to understand others' experiences and perspectives. It is marked by a willingness to learn, explore, and connect with diverse standpoints. It embodies a childlike sense of wonder, playfulness, and joy, allowing for an emotional response and an unprejudiced engagement with the world. In this hostile society treating trans* identities with curiosity and in this way

implying a desire to see them, to observe, and to learn about them might be the gentlest approach one can take.

Lastly, my work engages with what I would call the Relational gaze, acknowledging that identity exists in relation to others. It goes beyond a singular focus on the self or the subject being observed and acknowledges the relational dynamics at play. By adopting a relational gaze, the spectator embraces the idea that our experiences and identities are co-constructed through our interactions and relationships with others. It creates an awareness of the power dynamics, social structures, and historical contexts that shape our understanding of these relationships. The relational gaze is rooted in empathy, understanding, and a sense of interconnectedness.

The combination of the Dreamer's gaze, the Curious gaze, and the Relational gaze creates a dynamic of co-imagining, where relationality and the power of shared experiences are central elements. It invites the audience to explore the uncharted territories of realities and imaginations, and establish connections with others through curiosity and wonder. This is what I would call the Imaginative Gaze.

5.3 THE COMPLEX OF GAZES

Throughout the performance 'Becoming my nonbinary body: NOTES FROM INSIDE THE COCOON'(Kersbergen, 2023),

I invited the audience to engage with this combination of gazes. This is achieved through various operations, including the larger-than-life projections on two walls, encompassing the live performer and filling the space with dreamlike images. The work unfolded over a duration of three hours, deliberately slowing down and minimizing transformations, allowing spectators to focus on subtle shifts and encouraging imaginative exploration. The atmosphere in the space was intentionally soft, fostered through silence, slowness, and the gentle presence of the performer, promoting a sense of safety and relaxation. Additionally, the way the images were curated to come together to creates gaps that spark the viewer's imagination. The one operation that I would like to highlight here though is what I call the *complex of gazes*; the different gazes choreographed through space. The work did not simply deal with the gaze of the audience, but incorporated different types of gazes to support the audience in gazing in a multifaceted way.

Firstly, the performer returned the gaze to the audience with two main goals. The gaze of the spectators was no longer free or meaningless for they were also observed themselves. The way they engaged with the work and their body language were witnessed and acknowledged, as if being mirrored to them. Creating an intimacy between spectator and performer and exposing the vulnerability of looking. Subverting the male gaze in a sense for the distinction between the one looking

and the one being looked at disappeared and the audience could no longer remain solely a voyeur. The performer's body and the images presented were not there to be *consumed* by the audience but to actively engage with. At the same time, this reciprocal gaze is modeled, as the mode of gazing for the audience. The performer kept an open, curious, and gentle gaze, inviting the audience to look at the body in space, the projections, and the space created in between, as if to show them how the imagination could emerge.

Secondly, there was a choreography of gazes happening within the performance itself. Many of the images included the gaze of the performer in a certain way, inspired by the work of Cahun. One of the key aspects of Cahun's work was their deliberate manipulation of the gaze, both as the subject and the object of their photographs. They often confronted the camera with a direct, piercing gaze, defying the viewer's expectations, and asserting agency through the image. The images in 'Becoming my nonbinary body: NOTES FROM INSIDE THE COCOON' (Kersbergen, 2023), since they were multiple, overlaid, and glitched, contained multiple orientations of gazing, sometimes directly at (or through) the camera, other times off into different directions in space creating the suggestion that they could be looking at each other or the performer's present body. The performer at their turn looking at the audience and sometimes glancing at the projections serves as a medium to enter the world of imaginations and dreams depicted in the projections.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Throughout the thesis I have taken you along in my journey of the practice-led research, exploring the hypothesis that performance-based image-making on identity can serve as a transformative tool to become visible within the invisible time. I started with unpacking the intricacies of queer visibility as an act of resistance within societal norms and established a theoretical framework highlighting the role of imagination as a transformative tool in self-representation through image making.

I explained the use of feminist language in image-making within my practice and how it relates to understanding identity. Drawing inspiration from other artists working in similar ways, such as Cahun and Krimsky, I have questioned whether the visibility of identity is something tangible or something to be glimpsed or hinted at. Closing this writing on the topic of the gaze, I proposed strategies based on the complex of gazes for subverting the male gaze and to expand beyond binary perspectives.

Through opening up my process of performative image-making on identity I offer tools for others to temporarily make glimpses of their identity visible or tangible within self-representation. Identity cannot be fully contained in an

image but rather glimpsed through imagination when the normative gaze is challenged.

This research contributes to the field of image-making by shedding light on the impact of language and its effects on practice. It also adds to the discourse on queer identities and the significance of imaginative self-representation as an act of resistance. The concept of the imaginative gaze emerges as a key consideration in these discussions.

For future research directions, it would be worthwhile to continue exploring the relationship between the duration of looking and the subversion of the normative gaze and investigate how imagination can be effectively used in activism through performance art. Especially related to the concept of the complex of gazes and how that can be used subvert the normative gaze. Also a further understanding of how invisibility, visibility, and hyper visibility co-exist in the queer experience and how they can affect imagination would be interesting for further research. Deeper understanding in these areas would enrich our understanding of the transformative potential of image-making and its broader implications.

In summary, this research has unraveled the nuances of trans*nonbinary visibility, the power of imagination in image-making, and the subversion of normative gazes. It offers

tools for individuals to temporarily manifest glimpses of their identity through self-representation, emphasizing the act of resistance and challenging societal norms.

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