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Trans of Color Performance and Media

“in my briefs and opera gloves”

CONTENT WARNING: some nudity

“in my briefs and opera gloves” Visual Performance Piece:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eS2CMUNcABraB2S_ZmVyFtczMirsr4_j/view?usp=sharing

Performance Research Analysis

What I am thinking about is trusting the body, my body as a trans person of color, and how movement exploration is my promise to myself that I will listen to what feels necessary and urgent and careful and life(giving). There is something to say about being moved through improvisation that can always allow me to be enough for myself to show up here and now. I trust my nonlinear memories, those that have been transferred to me through bloodlines. My Abuelita Leonor used to dance like I do, and I had never known that until my 21st birthday. So now when I get the urge to dress up, to do my makeup, I know that I probably learned that from her. My hyperfemininity is not a betrayal to my identity but a way of reminding myself of the image of you, my ancestors. The ways I call myself are, too. Remembering is returning to ourselves, the way we might have been in our ancestors dreams.

This piece I am offering is called “in my briefs and opera gloves”. It is an embodied identification of my expression as a trans, nonbinary person and my relationship to that person

and the way they see themselves. My story about dressing myself in love is about dressing myself in my transness, in my illegibility and in my grief, too. This is a story about the way that I trace the parts of my body that were given to me by my mother and those that I find in practice and patience and rearticulation. It is also about grief because I do grieve the ways that I had looked for my own identifications for and of myself outside myself before I found them in me and in the mirrors and waters that reflect me, too. It is about my play and how much it can hurt to play and how often I find myself sore. This is an invitation to see me play.

Within “in my briefs and opera gloves” I performed what it means to miss and to be missing. What does the arrival at an absence require and how would I qualify it? How do I attend to its detection and does it require compensation or compromise? Removed from, misplaced, failure, avoidance, non-presence. How do I feel for what is not there? And is there a particular kind of grief for those things, people, and places that have transcended my relationship to them/it? Would it be recognizable if it once was, but no longer is familiar?

The question of missing informed a necessary attachment. Beyond what it means to miss something, there requires something to miss. There are more direct answers that can be assumed: a lover, a maternal figure, myself, but what I became more invested in is what the internal process of severance looked like and how embodied movement could speak to the somatic relations between myself, what is missing, and what becomes a fingerprint, a time stamp, and a pin point in time where what was or might have been still exists.

I began to draft a movement that lingered and trespassed bodies of memory. These gestures of memory lead me to deal with myself. As my most familiar and appropriate subject for researching trans of color performance, I started with what it means to dress myself. I am a twenty-one year old trans nonbinary person of color who descends from a Mexican and Filipinx

lineage that is conflated with histories of colonization. I am a nonbinary person who has a gender expression that can be regarded to as hyperfeminine.

As a ritual opening, “in my briefs and opera gloves” began with me dressing myself. This ritual as performance detailed the ways I attend to my expression as a queer person that exists within a binary world in which I am perceived as a women. It is an event that invokes the language from “Acts of Transfer” from *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* by Diana Taylor. This ritual reiterates a sense of identity and “amounts to an ontological affirmation, though a thoroughly localized one” (Taylor 3). My sheer bralette, my white briefs, and the red lipstick I paint on affirm the ways I see myself. To further emphasize the depth that this ritual holds, Taylor also argues that “Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere. To understand these as performance suggests that performance also functions as an epistemology” (Taylor 3). These acts are also those that allow me to know myself. My embodied practice of expression within a situated identity in the context of a binary world becomes a performance of choice and refusal, choice for the ways that I have tended to a vision of myself, a refusal of the normative perceptions that follow, and an affirmation for the ways I adorn my body.

Beyond my own decisions though are those ancestral memories that are tethered to me. My grandmother told me that my abuelita Leonor used to go and dance in her best clothes and would never be seen without her high heels on. My instinct to move from within and through improvised movement is informed by the hope that my movement might come from her or that I might see its influence beside me. This duette throughout a timeline of ancestry is influenced by the work of Merce Cunningham and John Cage who asked members within a piece to act

independently while still remaining situated together (Tate 1:55-2:22). Because I had never seen my great abuelita dance, I am left questioning if this expression was passed down through shared bodies and if I am engaging in conversation with her through movement. Again Taylor suggests that this embodied movement is the transmission of ancestral knowledge, engaging with both the archive as a memory of and the repertoire as an intuitive action (Taylor 26). My improvised movement then becomes a message, a prayer, and an attendance to my lineage.

Then words follow. What I have written and the places I go to in the piece are those that invoke the memory of being loved and loving. Where I am, the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve, is a place that was shared to me by my partner. We have been in a long distance relationship for two years that spans across an ocean and two continents. While he was visiting me this past winter, he took me to see a hidden pool. After he had gone back home, the words I have written had followed, and so I returned to where I could still see footprints from the tread in his boots that asserted that he was here and that I had been there too, in love and in another instance of being in a place and time that was real, but is no longer in our present reality. This acknowledgement is inspired by Marina Abramović confrontation with her former lover, Ulay, in “The Artist is Present” after making an invitation for audience members to share silence with her as they meet another’s eyes. Ulay unexpectedly arrives as a participant, leaving them both to reckon with their emotional shared history, and as they sit together, all can witness the power of memory (Abramović 1:16-2:56).

I dropped my partner off at the airport after he stayed with me for seven weeks. My words became a comfort from missing his immediate presence. In my notes app, I confessed the ways I would preserve and prolong him being here. I came into a realization that within a love that encouraged my fullest being, I could still recognize my former selves who mimicked an

ideal of love and continue to hold space for them, too. I made a promise to myself to keep this person who was acting through love safe and that I would offer the same love that I do for him to the parts of myself that I am still learning to love. Being in love is also a confrontation with grief for the ways that I wish my former self had known this love, too.

Within my poetry, I am attending to a queer temporality that is developed by Kara Keeling in *Queer Times, Black Futures*. Keeling, in identifying poetic futures, references Robin D.G. Kelley, stating, “In Kelley’s formulation, “poetry” or “poetic knowledge” has a temporal dimension: anchored in a “now,” it strives toward the future of a different present, a future presently accessible as a kind of yearning within a shared imagination” and further remarks that imagination “animates the production of “poetic knowledge” (which may be constituted by and accessed through any and all of the senses, or simply through a kind of intuition), giving it a form and content through which it might accrue a material force” (Keeling 84). While my research is limited to my experience as study as I invoke memories that I share with my partner, I am mapping a timeline that begins with myself before I transitioned and without knowing love to a present self who is affirmed as a trans person and is actively in love. I direct myself further towards a future that continues to engage in a liberating love that is oriented towards my own self-determination as an individual person who has consented and committed to being in a practice of love.

Throughout the piece, in my dressing in fashions and words, the experience of missing required an emotional processing. Grief had confronted me throughout the creation of “in my briefs and opera gloves”. It had done so as I clothed myself and danced and longed to be with myself sooner. Grief had come at the development of love, for the ways that I had grieved for myself, who I had integrated into this being and in attempts to assure my mother that I was still

her child if not her baby girl. Grief came in car rides and quiet moments before I made a spectacle of grief.

Grief as it made itself known beyond movement and written words came through song. In my piece, I have included “I Only Have Eyes For You” by The Flamingos, “Lonesome Lover” by Max Roach, and “Send In The Clowns” by Sarah Vaughn and the Count Basie Orchestra. “I Only Have Eyes For You” and “Lonesome Lover” related to my dressing, but “Send In The Clowns” was included for what it contributes to my piece itself. “Send In The Clowns” functioned as a vehicle for Marcia Ochoa’s conceptualizations of spectacularity in *Queen For A Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* and its proximity to my experience of grief in missing. As the song plays, I am driving while smoking a cigarette and singing as Vaughn depicts a losing of self through false characterizations and projections, taking on the imagery of clowns to do so. Ochoa understands this kind of performance as a spectacularity as it “employs existing conventions of media spectatorship to signify beyond a semantic level of speech” and is “the mode of address to an audience, and the ways in which the performance is subject to interpretation” (Ochoa 211). As I drive to the Ecological Reserve, I am moving with the language of loss that can be found in absence. Within my research, I convey that grief travels between real places that have value relationally and temporally.

I conclude “in my briefs and opera gloves” by arriving at a shared place that held an articulation of myself and another. I stand in the pool witnessing how swiftly love has moved me and how long my ancestors and I have traveled to be here in this body and these waters.

Works Cited

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