

Rebirthday:

Self-presentation, Suppression and Externally Excessive Expression

by

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Abstract

Rebirthday Self-presentation, Suppression and Externally Excessive Expression (hereafter referred to as “*Rebirthday*”) shines a light on the glamorous side of queer resistance. This thesis project seeks to complicate notions of marginality by exploring the long tradition of self-fashioned glamour as a survival tactic and form of world-making for non-normative people. *Rebirthday* investigates the evolution of my shifting identity by using self-fashioning and costuming as ways to manipulate the expression of my gender and identity.

Rebirthday materializes the personal interconnectedness between my artwork and my lived experiences. I re-imagine my social identity by combining sculptural installations with live performance and wearable objects. Through the customization and assemblage of found objects, my sculptures and performances engage with ideas of masking, mutation and *self*-making.

Rebirthday uses self- reflexivity as a methodology for asserting and acknowledging my positioning within this thesis project. As a methodology, self-reflexivity enables me to consciously and actively reference the artificiality of my identity through performance. Within this document, the differentiation between self-reflexivity and reflectivity is rooted in the idea that my reflexive positioning is embodied. I locate myself within the scope of my research via a reflective process.

Rebirthday is informed by Sara Ahmed’s writings on queer phenomenology concerning the relationship between bodies and objects, Dan Graham’s performance entitled *Performer / Audience / Mirror* (1975) involving his reflection on our perceptions of identity and Judith Butler’s feminist theories that reveal how our bodies perform and enact gender and identity. The primary point of my investigation is my own gendered identity and expression. My conceptual process is extremely anecdotal and autobiographical. I use my selfhood to explore the in-betweenness of my gender, my queerness and my shifting identity.

For me, *rebirthday* is every day.

I am performing at all times; my life alive, is a live performance.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my primary advisor Simone Jones and secondary advisor Kate Hartman for their profoundly empowering contributions made to the emergence of *Rebirthday*. Without them, this thesis project would not be what it is. I am wholeheartedly grateful for the space they both have created for me; a space where I am safe and free to be uninhibitedly me.

Dedication

To my younger self,

You are young.

You are out of focus.

An undeveloped photograph.

Your true composition will become clearer as you develop.

You have not yet reached your final state.

Truth.

*What you think right now is an impossible dream,
will soon become your reality.*

You are not alone.

I love you,

Danny

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Chapter 1: Preface

My burning curiosities in the visual arts can be traced all the way back to my intuitive interests in making and working imaginatively. I was encouraged to be creative at a very young age. As a child, I worked alongside my grandmother and produced various mixed media assemblages using traditional arts and crafts materials. I vividly remember constructing my own costumes and toys out of discarded items found both within the home and in nature. I found myself making things and transforming my exteriority as a way of affirming myself and actualizing ideas. I self-employed my methods of actualization and implemented them as catalysts for creation.¹ These self-employed methods have stayed with me throughout my life. Via a practice led process, I now recognize that my initially intuitive safety strategies have and always will exist as survival tactics.

¹ Sullivan, Graeme. 2010. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 65-92 and 95-120.

1.1 Rebirthday

The title of this research project: *Rebirthday* positions itself as a portmanteau of the words *rebirth* and *birthday*. A portmanteau is a linguistic fusion of sounds and words, in which parts of words are hybridized to form a new word. The term was initially used by Lewis Carroll to define many of his abnormal words in his book *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), predominantly in the poem “*Jabberwocky*.”² Much like the word smog, the homogenization of the words smoke and fog signify the blending of two states. This blending of two existing states allows for a portmanteau to begin to describe something that is *in-between*.

In many instances, queer and gender non-conforming youth do not allow ourselves to uninhibitedly evolve into our true forms. We dispose of our authenticity to minimize the harm of humiliation as a survival tactic to protect ourselves from prejudice. During adulthood, I am faced with the task to differentiate, distinguish, and decipher which parts of my identity are truthful from the contrived parts that may be plucked away. To be faced with this daunting dilemma is seemingly difficult. Nevertheless, my strong sense of self-awareness so early on in life has become a catalyst for the reconsideration of my gender expression. This reconsideration allows for a *rebirth* where the emergence of a new self can be fashioned and formed.

² Carroll, Lewis (2010) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* pp 64–65 Createspace ltd

1.2 My Story

Melodramatic costume, theatrical make-up, unsupervised play, and my imagination have always functioned as utopic getaways from the social body I have performed my whole life. In 2001, the seven-year-old child I knew as Daniel Douglas Welsh undoubtedly understood the consequence of deviance. Born and raised in Markham, Ontario, Canada, the masking and suppression of my truthful spirit, personhood, and identity was a daily occurrence. I often found myself concealing my truths only to reveal an expressive embodied exterior of what I thought normalized boyhood looked, acted, and sounded like. My entire demeanor would change; my interests, behavior, and vocabulary were all meticulously contrived constructions.



Figure 1: Grade One School Portrait at Aldergrove Public School, 2001

(scanned copy of original printed photographs)

This false façade adopted and affirmed various North American stereotypes of masculinity. Doing this did more harm than good. I felt as though I was halfheartedly acting a life that was completely foreign and unfamiliar to my own. The public persona I played at school created a distinct split in my personality. Once I got home, I would remove this contrived disguise and be free to be myself uninhibitedly. Caught in the *in-between*, my bedroom became a space for transformation. Behind closed doors, private personal performances became a daily occurrence. My reflection in my bedroom mirror was the main show and my plush stuffed animals sat front row.

Growing up, the expectation to be a certain way was profoundly present. I remember feeling as though conformity was a necessity. I thought I was defective. People's opinions of me and my fear of people's opinions of me were more important than what I thought of myself. I was trying to be what I thought everybody else wanted me to be. I was living my life for the people who were telling me who and what I had to be. I was squeezing myself into a mold that I was not fitting into. I seemingly looked wrong, talked wrong, walked wrong, and acted wrong. When I was at school, it was my world. It was all I knew. It consumed me.

I was living a life of lies. I was obsessed with keeping my true identity a secret. This secret was information only I could know. Possessing such secretive information made me accountable for its protection. Through a process of trial and error I developed various techniques to help conceal my truth. I became my own form of camouflage.

I was a conformist. I altered my personality, interests, mannerisms, and mentality. I made various attempts to play and associate with my male peers. I would imitate and impersonate their behavior. Externally, I was a replica of them. Or, at least I was attempting to be. Internally, I knew I was just a photocopy. I was a colourless reproduction. As a result, I had to come up with new strategies. I had developed a survival guide that consisted of successful ways to guarantee my safety. These strategies involved various forms of shapeshifting, where I would transform and present myself differently depending on my surroundings.

Chapter 2: Introduction

This thesis document contains an amalgamation of poetic and reflective writing that unveil personal narratives in relation to my own identity. The investigative inquiries of this project are autobiographical and self-reflexive, rooted in the expression of my own identity. My physical artwork and performances are practice-led, manifesting themselves as embodied expressions of my identity. Correspondingly, the poetic and reflective writings are evocative of my internal introspections.

My work begins with a yearning to alter my appearance. My wearable performative objects, have the potential to both distort and amplify my identity. For me, performance is a form of catharsis; the wearing of a sculptural costume allows me as the performer to embody a persona providing me the permission to behave uninhibitedly. This personified embodiment exists as a form of intuitive roleplay resulting in the fusion of inner fantasy and external reality.

I disrupt normalizing discourses of gendered identity by sculpturally subverting secondhand objects to exist and function contrary to what they were intended to be. I re-imagine my social identity by combining sculptural installations with live performance and wearable objects. I produce environments and experiences that enable me to express emotions, feelings, and sensations that I find difficult to communicate to others. When attempting to reconcile this difficulty, I inject my feelings of agitation and alienation into these artworks. I use my own body during performance as a way of provoking conversations around identity, selfhood, and the performativity of gender expression.

My work is constructed from found items, recycled objects, synthetic materials and thrift-store purchases. I view these objects as signifiers saturated in past history. I disrupt the proposed uses and significances of these objects through performance and sculptural subversion. I describe sculptural subversion as a method for alteration, recombination, and modification. Sculptural subversion destabilizes the state these objects exist in. The creation of these new configurations allows for the potential for new connotations to emerge.

Often closely affiliated with wealth and unattainability, glamour does not have a single, solid definition. Like the word queer, it can be defined in relation to specific signifiers yet, remains open to interpretation. Glamorous self-fashioning is a way for me to relate to, and exist within, mainstream society as a self-proclaimed gender-nonconforming deviant. Glamorous self-fashioning originates as an adopted attitude, in many ways in reference to both popular and high culture as well as being directly affiliated with the suppression of non-normative ways of presenting.

3 Sullivan, Graeme. 2010. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 65-92 and 95-120.

As seen in the pre-stonewall photographs captured by Weegee of some arrested crossdressers cheekily posing for the camera, to the 1980s New York underground ball scene documented by Jennie Livingston in *Paris is Burning* (1990), queerness is recognized as a visible embodiment. In *Paris is Burning*, it is clear that many of the young queer participant's inner dreams and desires revolve around reimagining, remaking, recreating, and rebirthing themselves into who they wish to be:

“Opulence – you own everything,” the man shouts from the pulpit. His phrasing gleams with a winking irony, twitches under the weight of its paradox. We believe it in spite of circumstance, which is this: the people of the room, the targets of this phrase, are all somehow “disenfranchised.” They are queer or trans, Black or brown. Mostly, they’re conjoined by these particulars, but also by a violent and unearned poverty. What do you got when you have no money? The answer, ostensibly, is “everything.”⁴

Paris Is Burning sheds light on the complicated nature of refashioning one's own identity as it relates to race, gender, class, and social positioning. I acknowledge and am aware of my distinct position of privilege both as a white skinned and (for the most part) male presenting queer person. I realize that refashioning myself into a depiction of what I would deem as glamorous is rooted in inbred hierarchal constructions of beauty; all of which are inherently subjective, oppressive, and marginalizing.

Curator Jon Davies suggests that queer glamour can be “reclaimed as the product of a defiant expression of marginalized identity.” He suggests that when we use the term “glamour” we are referencing the exciting and alluring qualities of one's appearance and performance. However, what he describes as “transgressive glamour” refers to glamour that refuses conventional notions of what is considered exciting and alluring and, whether intentionally or not, inflects glamour with traces of queer shame, suffering, struggle, and survival.⁵ Within the scope of *Rebirthday*, I choose to define and use “*queer*” as a term that is blurred, erratic, and in a constant state of emergence. This emergent state of queerness positions the term as a strategy for redefinition, and rebirth.

As marginalized people, queer folk and gender-nonconforming individuals often feel that speaking about ourselves and our experiences may seem selfish. We are made to feel that we cannot and shall not take up space. Inhibited by this inability, I have found myself in a place where deeming a space as safe has proven to be difficult. This document is a place for me to take up space; allowing for my voice to be heard and my story to be shared on my terms, in my terminology. This thesis document provides a figurative voice to the artwork.

⁴ Garel, Connor. “Paris Is Burning Is an Urgent Reminder of the Importance of Queer Spaces.” NOW Magazine, June 13, 2019. <https://nowtoronto.com/movies/features/paris-is-burning-importance-queer-spaces/>.

⁵ Davies, Jon. “Trash is Truth: Performances of Transgressive Glamour”. Master's Thesis, University of Toronto, 2004.

Chapter 3: Investigative Inquiries

Rebirthday investigates how the semiotics of behavior and self-fashioning significantly contribute to the understanding of my identity. My investigative inquiries question how my social self and externally expressed identity is influenced in relation to the people and places around me. These inquiries analyze the interconnectedness between my external expression and internalized identity. *Rebirthday* questions how this embodied expression could potentially communicate and/or conceal aspects about my identity to others. In this chapter, I acknowledge my past work *Behind Closed Doors* (2019), *Hide* (2018), and *Regalia* (2019) as informing the direction and trajectory of this thesis project.

3.1 *Behind Closed Doors: Private Performance*

My work *Behind Closed Doors* (2019), is a self-portrait of a private performance for the camera. The photograph (Figure 2) is accompanied alongside a poem that speaks to the connectedness between the role of make-up and the fashioning of my external identity. The intention of the work is to provide viewers with a glimpse into my private rituals of applying and removing makeup. In the photograph, I am seen wearing a dress that is constructed from my own personally used make-up wipes fastened together with small, synthetic gold safety pins. With this work, I intentionally disregard conventional methods of garment construction in order to reimagine an object's materiality and intended functionality.

To create the garment, I collected my used makeup wipes (over a 3-month period) after removing my day's face, configuring them into a patterned dress. Then, rather than sewing, I affixed each square together with over 500+ gold safety pins. Since its original fabrication, the safety pins have now oxidized to a greenish hue, taking the garment through its own physical transformation. The garment also emanates the conducive scent of cosmetics as well as my own bodily pheromones. When viewed up close traces of the private performance remain, where my hand prints, eyebrow, and eyelash shedding are seen as exposed evidence. As objects, each makeup wipe rests in an *in-between* state, evocative of the transitional state in-between the application and removal of make-up. The photograph captures this embodiment by revealing my demeanor when I wear this garment. Through photography, my previously private performances enter into a public place and allow me to let viewers into this space. The performances and installations within *Rebirthday* attempt to reconsider how private and public places are perceived. Thus, I acknowledge *Behind Closed Doors* (2019) as a milestone work in my progression from documented performance towards live performance.



*BEHIND CLOSED DOORS /
Danny Welsh / 2019*

*body-centric eccentricity
metamorphic multiplicity
authenticity
synchronicity*

*dissociative daze
mirrored gaze
a hasty haze
nowadays*

*safety pins
synthetic skin
fraternal twin
and so, it begins*

*a performative reoccurring ritual
secretly spiritual
heavily habitual*

*hybridization
embodied transformation
manifestation
domestic Dalmatian*

*best in show
internalized glow
taboo tableau
go go go*

*durational display
today's the day
time to play
wipe away*

Figure 2: *BEHIND CLOSED DOORS*: Danny Welsh, 2019

3.2 Shapeshifting: The Fluidity of Gender Non-conformity

Rebirthday shares distinct similarities to the artwork of Dominique Rey titled *Erlking* (2011). Within the publication *Pilgrims and Erlking by Dominique Rey* authored by Ryan Doherty and Jennifer Gibson, ideas of performativity, identity, and otherness arise. Rey's work *Erlking* (2011) depicts costumed individuals inhabiting a specific character that Rey embodies.

In her writings, feminist theorist Judith Butler maintains that the gendered body is performative, that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality.⁶ Butler argues that gender is socially constructed through commonplace speech and forms of non-verbal communication. Butler considers these forms of communication to be *performative*, in that they assist in defining our identities.⁷ This view of performativity reverses the idea that a person's identity is the source of their secondary actions (like their speech and/or gestures). Instead, it holds that actions, behaviors, and gestures contribute to the construction of identity which is continuously being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication. My five-day exhibition *Rebirthday* embraces this idea of malleability through its structure. Conceived as a transformative performance space where nothing stays the same, *Rebirthday* addresses how my exteriority and the outward expression of my inner identity is malleable and ever-changing.

In her *Erlking* series Dominique Rey manages to bring ideas of hybridized internal and external expression together to create wearable amalgamations that are seemingly continuously transforming. What seems to be at play within Rey's photographic series is an embodied transition into the unknown where bizarre human and fantastical hybridizations meld into the landscape. These hybrid figures are performed by the artist herself and demonstrate her attempts to tap into and release imagined personages lurking in her unconscious mind. Rey's transformation into such a vast array of guises is profound and begins with the layering and affixing of various objects onto her body, resulting in elaborate costumes with appendages and bulbous bodily formations.

⁶ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990

⁷ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990

Here boundaries are blurred between female and male, natural and artificial, human and object.⁸ I utilize the materiality of clothing as a medium that can be sculpted. Like Rey, I reconfigure these items as a means to morph my exteriority and problematize any sense of a fixed identity. This process of reconsidering, reconstructing, and reconfiguring is central to my performative transformation in *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (2019). (exemplified in Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Laundry Creature*: Danny Welsh, 2019

⁸ Gibson, Jennifer, Ryan Doherty, Josée Drouin-Brisebois, Leon Bernard Johnson, and Dominique Rey. *Erlking, Pilgrims: Dominique Rey*. Lethbridge, Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 2012. P.38.

I utilize the materiality of clothing as a medium that can be sculpted. Like Rey, I reconfigure these items as a means to morph my exteriority and problematize any sense of a fixed identity. This process of reconsidering, reconstructing, and reconfiguring is central to my performative transformation in *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (2019).

Rey uses concealment and camouflage tactics to obscure her gendered body. Often her costumed hands, face, and feet are unrecognizable. The metamorphosis of Rey's identity rests somewhere in-between masquerade and mutation. As embodiments of compelling creatures born in and out of the landscape but also located in our contemporary, material world Rey's creatures exist in a state in-between beauty and strangeness, a state that alternately draws us in and pushes us away.

At the beginning of the performance *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (2019), the *Laundry Creature* is a strange being that is engulfed in a bizarre collection of clothing. As the performance reaches its conclusion, these exterior items are stripped away to reveal my figure in a neutral state. The discarded clothing forms the shape of a rainbow. Each item has been arranged by colour and I am left wearing a uniform of white (symbolizing all of the colours that constitute visible light).



Figure 4: *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*: Danny Welsh, 2019

Preliminary Installation of *Rebirthday: Self-presentation, Suppression and Externally Excessive Expression*,
14 November 2019 (Rm 418, 205 Richmond Street West, Toronto).

The gesture of removal, or stripping away, signals my active engagement with the performative process of the construction of my identity. Within the structure of the *Rebirthday* exhibition, the removal of the material encumbrances from my body lays the foundation for my embodiment of the *White Tiger Mime*.

3.3 Staying Safe and Protecting Myself

Positioning myself within public space as a self-proclaimed deviant and gender non-conforming person is undoubtedly rooted in staying safe and protecting myself. For me, within public space I am made to feel that the unfiltered expression of my gender is inhibited and may not take place. The construction of my public personas exists as an assortment of disguises and takes on specific forms of dress. Predominantly consisting of worn garments, these disguises are often male-presenting, muted and toned-down. These disguises shapeshift, transform and present themselves differently depending on who I will be around, what time of day it is, where I am going, and how I intend on getting there. These disguises exist as an entire wardrobe in and of themselves.

Being mindful of how ideas of safety and protection influence and inhibit my gendered expression, I started to question if I could create an entity that encompassed these ideas.



HIDE / Danny Welsh / 2018

*look at me
who do you see?
he or she?
duality*

*they say, it's just a phase...
glamorous gaze
appearance hazed*

*outward guise
contrived disguise
mesmerize
googly eyes*

*out of place
veiled in lace
hidden face
sacred space*

*look both ways before crossing the
street...
red as a beet
trick or treat?*

Figure 5: *HIDE*: Danny Welsh, 2018

HIDE (2018) is a wearable mask constructed from faux cow fur, black fringe, embroidered lace and googly eyes all sewn together by hand. *HIDE (2018)* is accompanied by a poem I wrote intended to be performed while the mask is worn. I begin the performance by assertively asking to be looked at, intending to provoke the questioning of my exteriority. Then, I ask who is seen. “Who” is a pronoun that asks what or which person is being presented and perceived. Veiled in lace, *HIDE (2018)* makes me unrecognizable. With my appearance masked, the viewer is confronted by the gaze of an infinite ellipse of googly eyes. Through my voice and live performance, I theatrically speak the written incantation, speaking both to myself and the viewer (as seen beside Figure 5). Comparable to Rey’s *Erlking*, *HIDE (2018)* uses concealment to provide me with a sensation of safety while revealing a new state of *in-betweenness*.



Regalia / Danny Welsh / 2019

*Regalia disregards disguise.
Regalia does not have to hide.
Regalia is defined
through my eyes...*

*Regalia is individualized.
Regalia comes alive with pride!
Realized,
within Regalia I reside...*

Figure 6: *Regalia*: Danny Welsh, 2019

Then, *Regalia* was created in January 2019. *Regalia* (2019) is constructed out of a spray-painted, one-piece Tyvek suit embellished with large patches of appliquéd textiles and fringe. Unlike *HIDE* (2018), *Regalia* (2019) refuses to be muted or toned down. *Regalia* (2019) is covered with a colourful array of iconographic imagery. *Regalia* exists as a byproduct of the emphatic nature of do-it-yourself safety and survival.

Tyvek one-piece suits have become a quintessential signifier of safety. Tyvek one-piece suits are often worn by painters, oil industry, laboratory, and cleanroom workers. As a uniform, Tyvek suits are valued for their ability to protect the wearer's body from external toxicity, harm, and danger. The ways in which Tyvek suits inherently signify seemed profoundly relevant to the conceptualization of the entity I initially intended to create. I utilize the Tyvek suit as a statement to signify my many attempts at simultaneously protecting and presenting myself. When personalizing the embellished exterior of *Regalia*, connotations of celebration, flamboyancy, and festivity were in the forefront of my mind. When worn, *Regalia* (2019) is activated and brought to life through improvised dance. My improvised movements trigger the multicolored arm fringe to produce audible sounds both earthly and ethereal.

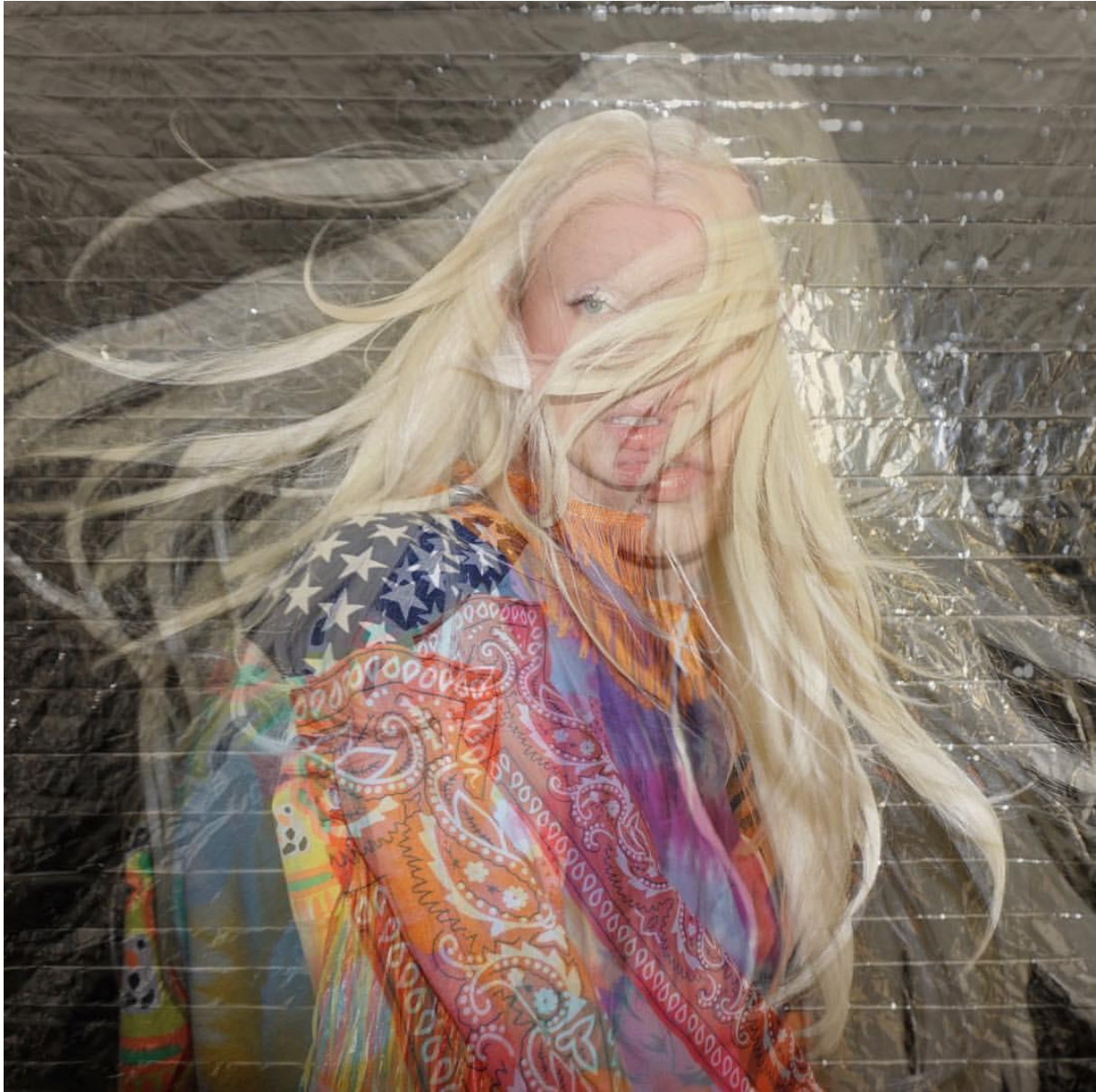


Figure 7: *Regalia*: Danny Welsh, 2019

Regalia (2019) was created due to a spirit within me that had been suppressed for far too long. The creation of *Regalia* was an excessive eruption. As a result of an urgent need to let my suppressed spirit out, *Regalia* allowed the suppressed spirit to be external from me.

Regalia commands to be seen.

Regalia demands to be heard.

Chapter 4: Contextualization of Translation

Within this chapter, I examine my relationship to my body and wearable objects and how I orient myself in relation to these objects. The expression of my queerness is an inherently performative act. Through the ways I choose to orient myself in the form of clothing, mannerisms, and the words I speak, I carefully construct how I could potentially be perceived.

People transform and manipulate their physical appearance to embody a character, a gender, or a persona. This transformation exists as a state of being relating to the personhood of the performer. When acknowledging ideas of gender, queerness problematizes gendered binaries. Queerness is the grey area *between* stereotypical definitions of what is considered to be male and female. Butler acknowledges gender performativity as a strategy of resistance, making reference to the replication of gender norms evident in the “cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities”.⁹ By acknowledging the space *in-between* gendered binaries, my work suggests that a new form of fluidity may be manifested. Queerness is often sexualized and associated in relation to LGBTQ2+ ways of identifying. Personally, I equate queerness to non-normative deviance.¹⁰ This is a perspective *Rebirthday* adopts and is the trajectory for my future work.

⁹ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 137

¹⁰ Michael Warner popularized the term heteronormativity in 1991 as found in: Warner, Michael (1991), “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet”. *Social Text*, No.9, pp. 3-17. I use the term “non-normative deviance” in response to ideas of heteronormativity.

4.1 My Body and Object Relations

A gaff is a small garment (often a rectangular piece of cloth), that is fastened around the waist and between the legs to cover the user's genitals. The idea is to push the testicles up into the inguinal canals and gently pull the penis and scrotum between the legs and towards the rectum. Duct tape may be used during this process to fasten everything into place. This process is called *tucking*. For those who experience a state of unease or dissatisfaction related to the appearance of their bodies, tucking is a way for them to feel more like their bodies match the gender they feel inside.

While creating a series of twelve gaffs entitled *TUCK (2018)*, I was influenced by Sara Ahmed's text *Queer Phenomenology Orientations, Objects, Others*. Ahmed reflects on the performativity of queerness and questions what happens when the very act of orientation becomes queer.¹¹ Ahmed views Queer Phenomenology as an orienting device and suggests that bodies, as well as objects, relationally configure themselves through being situated in regard to one another. The objective of *TUCK (2018)* was to reconfigure and reconsider my relationship to objects that assist in shaping my body. From left to right, each gaff stylistically embodies an aesthetic correlating to the twelve months of the year and are all hand sewn. A gaff is typically intended not to be seen, seamlessly invisible when worn under clothing. The gaffs within *TUCK (2018)* however, have the potential to exaggerate and amplify the body of the wearer. This amplification can most vividly be imagined in reference to the pink feathers of the February gaff and fuzzy white faux fur of the December gaff.

TUCK (2018) takes on the appearance of garments on a clothes line, where each gaff is held in place via wooden clothes pegs. The tactility, pattern, colour, and texture of the materials used to create each gaff was intentional. I intended for each gaff to exist as a bright, approachable, and lighthearted entity. Celebrating flamboyancy, *TUCK (2018)* presents itself in plain sight. The installation of this work is bookended with two photographed crotch-shots of me wearing two different gaffs found on the clothes line. I utilize *TUCK (2018)* as a form of self-exposure. *TUCK (2018)* publicly reveals concealed truths around a process that is often hidden. With nothing to hide, *TUCK (2018)* allows the viewer into a space where ideas around gendered bodies, and orientation can be considered.

¹¹ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006, p.65.



Figure 8: *TUCK*: Danny Welsh, 2018

4.2 *The Thrift Shop: The Rebirth of Second-hand Objects*

When an object is no longer valued in the same way it initially once was, it is discarded and potentially donated to charity residing on the shelves of thrift or second-hand stores before being rebought. Thrift shops exist as compartmentalized amalgamations of individualistically unique objects arranged, displayed, and organized in a way similar to the layout of a department store. These previously enjoyed objects wait patiently yearning to seduce potential purchasers with their functionality, uniqueness, and significances. When considering purchasing one of these objects, I think about how these objects could be of use to me. I initially acknowledge these objects and their inherent functionality. I question the malleability these objects possess. With transformation in mind, I contemplate and consider what these objects could potentially be. I describe these methods of reconsideration and processes of discovery as a form of treasure hunting.

My treasure hunting process begins with a procedure of constructing comparisons between objects. I contrast these objects in relation to each other based on their exterior appearances, conditions, and qualities. Typically, most objects appear mundane and monotonous. At the same time, other objects stick out from their counterparts and captivate my interest. I would describe the objects I choose to use as embodying a particular peculiarity. When enamored by an objects peculiarity and uniqueness, I know I have found my treasure. These treasures are usually embellished with iconographic imagery significant to my identity. For me, this personally affiliated peculiarity makes these treasures distinctly different from other objects.

From the films of director John Waters popularizing trash aesthetics to the “readymade” sculptures of artist Marcel Duchamp, visual artists have a longstanding tradition of seeking out second-hand objects as source material. These second-hand source materials are catalyst for creative inspiration. The most famous instance of this is Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), an unaltered urinal displayed on a plinth. His “readymades” disrupted the discourse around the artist’s role as that of a talented creator of distinctive one-of-a-kind, handmade objects. Duchamp claimed to have chosen everyday objects “based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste...”¹²

In Andre Breton and Paul Eluard’s *Dictionnaire Abrege du Surrealisme*, a Readymade was described as, ‘an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist’.¹³ Coinciding with and evolving from the Dada movement, was the birth of Surrealism.¹⁴

¹² Duchamp as quoted in *The Art of Assemblage: A Symposium*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961

¹³ Andre Breton and Paul Eluard, *Dictionnaire Abrege du Surrealisme*, 1938, p. 23

¹⁴ Readymade objects continue to be used in contemporary practice including: the work of artist Colette Urban uses readymade thrift store items as source material and adopts an exaggerated colourful aesthetic. Urban’s visual aesthetics are an influence for me. Specifically, her costume worn in her performance *Consumer Cyclone* (1993-2008).

My work is constructed from found items, recycled objects, synthetic materials and thrift-store purchases. I view these objects as signifiers saturated in past history. I disrupt the proposed uses and significances of these objects through performance and sculptural subversion. I describe sculptural subversion as a method for alteration, recombination, and modification. Sculptural subversion destabilizes the state these objects exist in, resulting in the creation of new configurations allowing for the emergence of new connotations.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the title of this research project: *Rebirthday* positions itself as a portmanteau of the words *rebirth* and *birthday*. In my sculpture *REBIRTHDAY Banner* (2020) I physically manifest this portmanteau as a means of reimagining a conventional “Happy Birthday” message. Utilizing the pre-existing letters of the word Happy, I cut, rearranged, and glued them together to create the letters R and E. I then took these newly created letters and attached them to the BIRTHDAY portion of the original banner. The blending of these two words, “REBIRTH” and “BIRTHDAY” allows for a portmanteau to describe the power I feel with the acceptance of my shifting identity, defined in my terms and on my time.



Figure 9: *REBIRTHDAY Banner*: Danny Welsh, 2020

4.3 Signification and Representation: Conveying Meaning Through Materiality

Through the assemblage of these materials, my sculptures demonstrate the subversion of iconography. My desire to create body-centric sculpture and performances through the customization and assemblage of found objects engages with ideas of masking, mutation and *self*-making. When pondering perceptions of what makes an object itself, I acknowledge the mutual interaction between the object and the place of the object within human life as being profoundly relational.



Figure 10: *Table of Contents*: Danny Welsh, 2019

I understand the existence of objects as a demonstrative example of relationality and subjective connectedness. I reference relationality as a form of collaborative identification; objects are identified in relation to other objects and are categorized by comparisons as demonstrated by my sculpture *Table of Contents* (2019). *Table of Contents* (2019) is a tabletop sculpture comprised of objects gathered from my personal archive and purchased from dollar stores. The sculpture is a self-portrait that is meant to be perceived as a story. There is no one fixed meaning that can be ascribed to the work. However, each object contains enough information that when read in reference to one another suggests a portrait of a person or provides a map of their personal history.

Similar to how the departments within a thrift shop are organized, I view my approaches involving the assemblage of found materials as carefully curated constructions. The connectivity between the objects within my exhibition is highly deliberate. My installation of *Rebirthday* exists as a highly intentional arrangement of objects. The ways I install these objects in relation to other objects has the potential to shift their meanings. Recognizing my capability to create connections between objects enables me to begin to communicate my story via installation. For me, this method of placement and provocation allows installation to exist as a form of translation.

Both the literal and symbolic place of objects within my life is truly constructed by my relationship to and with an object itself. Often these objects form a relationship to my body. Much like the experience of wearing a gaff, this bodily relationality is often physically rooted, yet has the potential to trigger emotional and even spiritual responses for me. Objects enable me to physically feel more closely connected to and secure within my own body.

Rebirthday remains hyper aware of the subjectivity of signification. I understand that defining the significance of the objects I use is informed by my lived experience. My relationship to objects is active and aware. I question what an object is considered to be and what an object could potentially become when it is positioned into dialogue with other objects. This performative gesture is generative and leads to the formation of new meanings.

Chapter 5: The Exhibition and COVID-19

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the exhibition *Rebirthday* was never realized. Exhibited over the course of five days, (as seen below) the installation and appearance of what I intended to present would have existed in an *in-between* state of emergence. The space would have transformed, shapeshifted, and presented itself differently each day, resting comfortably in a state of fluidity with the accumulation of the traces of each day's performance. The installation *Rebirthday* was intended to be cumulative and durational, where only on the final day of the exhibition, would my excessive and expressive exteriority present itself in its entirety.

Adopting the structure of a story arc, my intention of having three performances during the exhibition of *Rebirthday* is to illustrate both a literal and figurative transformation. I utilize a story arc to demonstrate the change of my character and stage of the exhibition space from one state to another. As a form of storytelling, my three-part story arc allows me as the main character to go through substantial growth and change. Resulting in a celebratory *Rebirthday Extravaganza*, the transformation of the exhibition space culminates in the last third of my story arc.

The closing reception would have taken place on the final day of the exhibition, taking shape in the form of a celebratory *Rebirthday Extravaganza*. The performances on both Monday, March 30, 2020 and Wednesday, April 1, 2020 would have taken place promptly 4:00pm on those days. My birthday is on the 4th of July. The number 4 has profound significance and meaning in my life. My decision to start my performances promptly at 4:00pm is due the power the number 4 possesses for me. The *Rebirthday Extravaganza (Closing Reception)* would have taken place between the hours of 4:00pm – 7:00pm on Thursday, April 2, 2020.

Open Gallery Hours: 4:00pm – 7:00pm (Monday to Friday)

Sunday, March 29, 2020: Installation

Monday, March 30, 2020: *Somewhere Over the Rainbow: In-betweenness, and Synthesized Space*

Tuesday, March 31, 2020: Open Gallery

Wednesday, April 1, 2020: *The White Tiger Mime*

Thursday, April 2, 2020: *Rebirthday Extravaganza (Closing Reception)*

Friday, April 3, 2020: Open Gallery

Saturday, April 4, 2020: De-installation



Open Gallery Hours:
4:00pm – 7:00pm
(Monday to Friday)

Monday, March 30, 2020:
Somewhere Over the Rainbow
Performance at 4:00pm

Tuesday, March 31, 2020:
Open Gallery

Wednesday, April 1, 2020:
The White Tiger Mime
Performance at 4:00pm

Thursday, April 2, 2020:
Rebirthday Extravaganza
Closing Reception at 4:00pm

Friday, April 3, 2020:
Open Gallery

**REBIRTHDAY
Danny Welsh
2020**

OCAD University
Graduate Gallery
205 Richmond St W
Toronto ON M5V 1V3
Canada

Figure 11: *Rebirthday* Poster: Danny Welsh, 2020

5.1 *Somewhere Over the Rainbow: In-betweenness, and Synthesized Space*

Somewhere Over the Rainbow, Danny Welsh (2019) is a performance that functions as a cleansing ritual. *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* is an emergent metamorphosis of my exterior body situated within an installed dreamscape. My performance begins with my body fully concealed by multiple layers of my own clothing and belongings. The entrancing lullaby-like quality of the sound of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* from *The Wizard of Oz* is heard playing within the space and lures the viewer in. Held down by the weight of the garments, my bodily movements are restricted and reduced. Sluggishly, I move throughout the gallery. Self-described as a *Laundry Creature*, (as seen in Figure 12) I start to pluck away each garment individually. One-by-one, these layers gradually reveal my human figure. I describe these layers as a representation for the multilayered making of my identity. The plucking process is evocative of my longing to find an expression of myself that is embedded layers deep.



Figure 12: *Laundry Creature*: Danny Welsh, 2019

Somewhere Over the Rainbow (2019) signifies the desire we associate with the character “Dorothy” from the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* and her longing for a dreamscape beyond the world of unfulfilled promises and disappointment and reminds us of a social reality that is not that easy to escape.¹⁵ By veiling the doorway with a translucent grayscale white tiger curtain, I offer the viewer the potential to shift their role into that of a participant. This purposed participation offers participants the potential to literally enact “pulling back the curtain” passing through the portal from their grayscale reality into my technicolour fantasy.

Once the cleansing ritual is completed, I then rearrange and reconfigure the garments, attempting to find order in the chaos I have created. I begin to arrange the garments into seven colour piles consisting of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. I begin to surround myself with each colour pile, starting with violet. Working outwards from my body, I begin to morph these garments into a floor-based sculpture reminiscent of a rainbow, underneath a suspended sun tapestry. The performance nears completion once all garments have been utilized and my body has been fully encircled. Dressed entirely in white, I am seen kneeling at the centre of my rainbow configuration with my eyes closed. The performance ends after I breathe twenty-five breaths in and out. Each one of these breaths signifies each year I have been alive.

¹⁵ Urban, Colette, Melanie A. Townsend, and Robert Bean. Colette Urban: *Incognito*. London, Ont.: Museum London, 2013. Pg. 81



Figure 13: *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*: Danny Welsh, 2019

Preliminary Installation of *Rebirthday: Self-presentation, Suppression and Externally Excessive Expression*,
14 November 2019 (Rm 418, 205 Richmond Street West, Toronto).

Somewhere Over the Rainbow (2019) draws inspiration from the methods, processes and work of artist Nick Cave. Raised in a lower middle-class family, Cave utilized the surplus around him as a form of found art supplies. Similar to Cave, my earliest childhood creations were created from my natural surroundings or objects within my house. I strongly affiliate my conceptualization of materiality with Cave's act of making something out of nothing. His work starts with an object that provokes him with the beginning of an idea, an impulse or sensation resulting in multiple ways to read into something.¹⁶ A commonality between Cave and myself is that both of our practices are rooted in a craving to comprehend our queerness while attempting to make our queerness visible.¹⁷

Cave is well known for his *Soundsuits*, sculptural forms based on the scale of his body.¹⁸ *Soundsuits* camouflage the body, masking and creating a second skin that conceals race, gender, and class, forcing the viewer to look without judgement.¹⁹ Cave's *Soundsuits* are wearable devices that are the catalyst for live public performances. In a 2013 feature in Interview Magazine, Cave said of his project HEARD-NY, a large-scale performance in Grand Central Terminal organized by Creative Time, "I was really thinking of getting us back to this dream state, this place where we imagine and think about now and how we exist and function in the world. With the state of affairs on the world, I think we tend not to take the time out to create that dream space in our heads."²⁰ As a result of struggling to find my place in this earthly realm, *Rebirthday*, intends to physically manifest this dream space Cave describes and exists as a dreamscape of my internalized fantastical visions.

¹⁶ As written in a statement from the Jack Shainman Gallery: "While Cave's artworks are rooted in our current societal moment, when progress on issues of global warming, racism, and gun violence (both at the hands of citizens and law enforcement) seem maddeningly stalled, he asks how we may reposition ourselves to recognize the issues, come together on a global scale, instigate change, and ultimately, heal."

¹⁷ Morrow, William. "Inside Look at Nick Cave: Sojourn." Denver Art Museum. Accessed October 04, 2018. <https://denverartmuseum.org/exhibitions/nick-cave>

¹⁸ Cave, Nick, Kyle MacMillan, and William Morrow. *Sojourn: Nick Cave*. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2013.

¹⁹ Cave, Nick, Kyle MacMillan, and William Morrow. *Sojourn: Nick Cave*. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2013.

²⁰ Cave, Nick, Kyle MacMillan, and William Morrow. *Sojourn: Nick Cave*. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2013.

While wearing Cave's *Soundsuits*, performers inhabit public environments and exist as undistinguishable sculptural creatures. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed states that bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other.²¹ The interactions between performers and pedestrians creates a relational relationship within a social setting. This open engagement encouraged participants – artists and others – to reconsider ideas of place and space. When worn, Cave's *Soundsuits* position the wearer in the role of an otherworldly entity with an ambivalent identity. Cave's *Soundsuits* both distort and amplify the wearers' physicality. Through being oriented toward each other, the sculptural objects come to life through the performance and movement of the human body. I perceive a distinct link *between* Ahmed's relationship to orientation *between* objects and Cave's relational relations between audience and performer. During *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, I sculpturally subvert the items I have plucked off of me by physically manipulating them. Through disregarding their intended use, purpose, and function I utilize these items as having a sculptural materiality with an intent to be morphed.

We are oriented toward what is in front of us; what we can perceive, Ahmed says.²² Much like the participant's engagement with myself as the *Laundry Creature*, when confronted by an inhabited *Soundsuit*, the perception of what is in front of us is hard to describe. We are presented with sculptural amalgamations that create ambivalent forms concealing the physicality of the performer. We begin to relate to these forms both bodily and emotionally. Through visual signifiers, we make connections to various iconographic symbols, past histories and stories all of which are inherently gendered. Similar to Cave's *Soundsuits*, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, offers viewers the potential to reimagine their place and position within space and provides them with a chance to be transported into a figurative dream.

²¹ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

²² Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

5.2 Relational Relationships: People, Place and Performativity

Within *The Art of Ethnography: The Aesthetics or Ethics of Participation*, Hjorth provokes discussion around relational aesthetics and social practice. In relational aesthetics, the audience is employed as a catalyst for collaboration. Performance could be considered relational when it relies upon a relationship *between* the performer and spectator, that goes beyond the visual.

This performance of reciprocal relations is a form of collaborative production.²³ Collaboration exists as a significant method for opening up understandings of my identity. Through body language and non-verbal communication, my improvised actions and reactions during performance are highly dependent on the spectatorship and potential participation of the audience. This relationship exists as a kind of two-sided exchange where both performer and spectator share a sense of mutualism. I describe mutualism as a form of give-and-take relationship.

Performance and participation are not one and the same. Without both the performer and spectator, the performance cannot occur. With an absent audience, a performance turns into a secretive (or private) act.²⁴ With an audience, a performance becomes a demonstrative example of relationality and societal connectedness.

This relational connectedness is an interpretation of an individual's place within space, while simultaneously deconstructing philosophies surrounding identity and selfhood. Sara Ahmed conceptualizes ideas of space in relation to bodily orientation and disorientation, as expressed in *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed states: "If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with".²⁵

²³ Hjorth, Larissa, and Kristen Sharp. "The Art of Ethnography: The Aesthetics or Ethics of Participation?" *Visual Studies* 29, no. 2 (2014): 131

²⁴ I acknowledge that performing for a camera is private yet the data of the photograph can be published publicly which influences how I perform for the implied audience.

²⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. p. 1.

5.3 *The White Tiger Mime*

A mime artist is a person who utilizes the methods of mime as a melodramatic medium. Similar to the non-verbal communication of gender-expression, miming involves enacting out a narrative through bodily movements and physical signifiers. Modern mime performance embodies contemporary forms of storytelling. Modern miming adopts methods of storytelling that are described as either abstract or literal.²⁶ Abstract mime typically does not feature a main character and has no storyline. Rather, the abstract mime focuses on provoking thoughts about particular subject matter through embodied expressions of certain moods and emotions. Oppositely, the literal mime tells a story that includes characters and a linear narrative. Some modern versions of mime combine both abstract and literal forms allowing for new hybridizations to be birthed. These modern hybridized forms of mime are most popularly adopted by street performers and buskers. Traditionally, these street performers are seen fashioned in fitted black and white striped tops, black bottoms and white face paint.

Adopting aesthetics of modern mime performance, *The White Tiger Mime* (2020) is a performance where I enact a transformation of becoming a modern-day mime. Yet, my transformation is far from traditional...

The performance begins with me sitting at a vanity. I sit bare-chested gazing at my mirrored reflection. Within the exhibition space is the sound of a playlist of songs I have curated. Similar to the way I work with objects, the playlist heard within the exhibition space exists as a repurposed selection; a collection of lyrics and songs performed and written by LGBTQ2+ affiliated artists, musicians, and allies. This playlist acts as a form of loose narrative. Evocative of the shapeshifting nature of my identity, the mood and pace of this playlist is in a state of fluctuation. I emote these multiple moods and paces during performance. I embody them gesturally through improvised facial and bodily choreography.

²⁶ Nielsen, Erik. "Different Mime Types." Our Pastimes, January 10, 2019. <http://ourpastimes.com/different-mime-types-12347071.html>.

The White Tiger Mime Performance Playlist:

- “Starman”- David Bowie (1972)
- “I Will Survive” - Gloria Gaynor (1978)
- “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)” – Sylvester (1978)
- “I’m Coming Out” – Diana Ross (1980)
- “A Little Respect” – Erasure (1988)
- “Express Yourself” – Madonna (1989)
- “Vogue” – Madonna (1990)
- “Freedom! 90” – George Michael (1990)
- “Supermodel (You Better Work)” – Ru Paul 1993)
- “I U She” – Peaches (2003)
- “Take Your Mama” – Scissor Sisters (2004)
- “When I Grow Up” – The Pussycat Dolls (2008)
- “Dancing on My Own” – Robyn (2010)
- “Born This Way” – Lady Gaga (2011)
- “Let’s Have a Kiki” – Scissor Sisters (2012)
- “Bloom” – Troye Sivan (2018)
- “I Feel Love” – Sam Smith (2019)
- “Stupid Love” – Lady Gaga (2020)

During performance, I embody the white Bengal tiger. Contrary to popular belief, white Bengal tigers are not a separate species in and of themselves. Rather, white Bengal tigers are a mutant form of their orange Bengal tiger relatives. The stripes of a Bengal tiger are reminiscent of a human finger print, where no two tigers have the same striped markings. Their markings are skin deep. If a Bengal tiger’s coat were to be shaved, their distinctive coat patterning would still be visible. White Bengal tigers are often mislabeled as being born defective. A single gene manifests itself in a physical exteriority that is visibly different from the usual appearances of their more ordinary orange relatives. I view the “embodied deviance” of the white Bengal tiger’s mutant exteriority as being evocative of my own queerness.

My enacted gestures directly correspond with what is being said linguistically with the lyrics of the music playing. I am seen physically acting out the lyrics. I allow for space to exist *in-between* moments of movement. The curated playlist provides my performance with a structural framework. This framework is pre-meditated. I allow myself to know what song is coming next, enabling myself to improvise without hesitation. I describe the hybridization of my pre-meditated and improvised movements as a form of embodied choreography.

A costume rack of clothing items and accessories are seen beside the vanity. The costume rack and vanity is accompanied by a one-person mirror and platform that acts as a stage. My installation is evocative of an imaginary change room. I subvert the conventional black and white striped attire of the modern mime by creating a costume rack entirely comprised of clothing patterned with the markings of the white Bengal tiger.



Figure 14: *The White Tiger Mime*: Danny Welsh, 2020

Preliminary Installation of *Rebirthday: Self-presentation, Suppression and Externally Excessive Expression*

I gesture towards, perform, and transform for my mirrored self. I start by applying a base coat of white face paint onto my face, reminiscent of the makeup worn by a modern mime. I continue this face painting process, slowly adding more detail to my face. I modify and warp the appearance of modern mime makeup by adding additional black lines and markings to my face. My gestures and mark-making techniques become more stylized and intricate. I start to paint the façade of a white Bengal tiger onto my face. Slowly, I observe as my face becomes zoomorphized. When the face painting process is complete, I stare at my mutated mirrored reflection. Then, I begin to change into costume.

At this point, a distinct shift takes place. Now masked, it is at this moment where I turn around and face the viewers. This shift allows for the delineating space *in-between* private and public performance to be exposed and blurred. Through looking back at the viewer, I make it clear that I have been aware of their presence the whole time. Dressed in my full zoomorphic ensemble, I melodramatically mime along to the music. As specified in the Abstract of this document, I use self-reflexivity as a methodology, that enables me to consciously and actively reference the artificiality of my identity during performance.

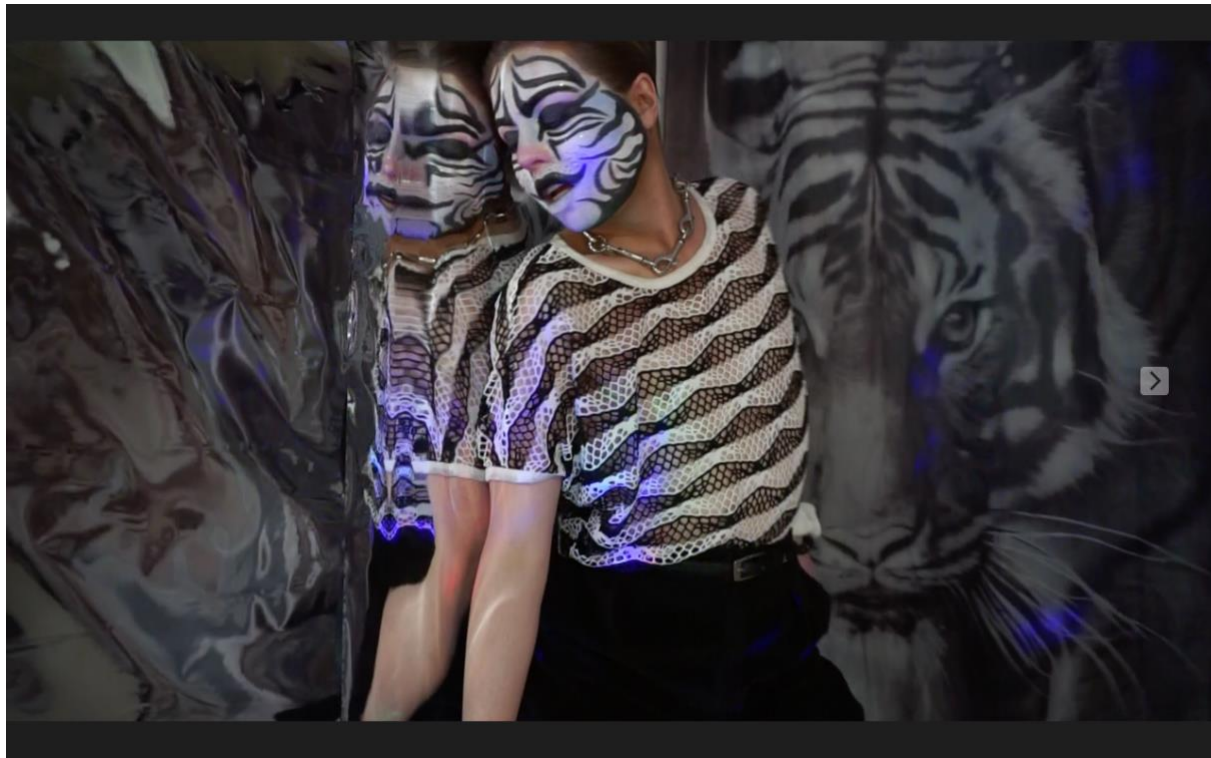


Figure 15: *The White Tiger Mime* (film still): Danny Welsh, 2020

Standing upon a stage, I self-reflexively poke fun at the ridiculousness of my relationship to the viewers. Here, the song lyrics are used for their communicative power. My facial expressions and bodily movements challenge, complicate, and contradict the phrases within the lyrics. Through mime, I modify the meaning and significances of these phrases. These moments of modification position me in the roles of the storyteller and conductor. This positioning permits me to convey complicated inner narratives that can only be conjured when positioned in such roles.

5.4 *The Mirror: A Self-Reflexive Reflection*

The audience is an essential component in artist Dan Graham's performance *Performer / Audience / Mirror* (1975) first performed at the De Appel Arts Centre in Amsterdam.²⁷ During performance, Graham speaks aloud, directly to the audience, describing himself and how he examines and interprets the audience as they sit and view him standing in front of a mirrored backdrop. He then turns around, facing his reflection and describes himself and the reflected audience within the mirror. I use mirrors within *Rebirthday* as devices to allow for both literal and figurative reflections of both the viewers and my self-fashioned exteriors to be present within the gallery space, thus, setting up potential instances for viewers to be confronted by their identities.

The integration of the mirror allows the audience to instantaneously perceive and acknowledge themselves within the space. While their identities are reflected instantly, Graham's descriptions are delayed. "First, a person in the audience sees himself 'objectively' ('subjectively') perceived by himself, next he hears himself described 'objectively' ('subjectively') in terms of the performer's perception."²⁸ Similar to Graham, as witnessed in *The White Tiger Mime* (2020), the awareness of my performativity is a key component to the conceptualization of *Rebirthday*. *Performer / Audience / Mirror* (1975) may be viewed as a phenomenological inquiry into the connectedness *between* audience and performer in correspondence to notions of subjectivity and objectivity.²⁹ Correspondingly, *Rebirthday* encourages us to reconsider our perceptions of identity, allowing us to reflect on how our identities are constructed and conceived.

²⁷ "Now Showing: Performer/Audience/Mirror (1975) by Dan Graham." Lisson Gallery. Accessed February 5, 2020. <https://www.lissongallery.com/news/now-showing>.

²⁸ Graham, Dan (Lori Zippay, 1991)

Performer / Audience / Mirror. Surveying the First Decade: Volume 1. Video Data Bank. Accessed January 23, 2020. <http://www.vdb.org/titles/surveying-first-decade-volume-1>.

²⁹ *Performer / Audience / Mirror*. Surveying the First Decade: Volume 1. Video Data Bank. Accessed January 23, 2020. <http://www.vdb.org/titles/surveying-first-decade-volume-1>.

Chapter 6: Significance and Reflection

We exist as the embodiment of similarities and differences linked to our physical bodies, gendered identities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic status, race and class. As humans, we are defined in relation to each other. Through the exploration of our selfhoods we must celebrate our uniqueness. Language has proven to be limiting. Even when we cannot find the words to articulate, categorize, or classify, we must accept our inability to define our state of being. What is considered to be undefinable? Like the fluidity of an in-between state of being, *Rebirthday* considers the potential for the lack of a definition to very well exist as a definition in and of itself.

Effeminate men and gender non-conforming people in North America specifically, are made to feel that our existence, behavior and ways of expressing ourselves is seen as too much, overdone, bothersome, inconvenient, and obnoxious. Often, in many cases our excessiveness is a result of years of suppression.

By situating my costumed self within a public exhibition space, I provoke and spark conversations around my social body, relationality, identity and outward expression. My installation, sculptures, and performances provide me with the freedom to exist and act uninhibitedly. When wearing my own sculptures, I am transformed and protected. When protected by my sculptures, I am brought closer to my truth and reside comfortably within my body. Personified performative presentation provides me with power. I am unrestricted and allowed to unabashedly express myself. During performance, I conceal myself while simultaneously revealing myself.

By occupying the exhibition space during *Rebirthday*, my existence creates a visual representation of nonconformity, in-betweenness and fluidity. I use my own identity as a self-proclaimed gender non-conforming deviant as a form of representation. Through my embodied representation, the intention of *Rebirthday* is about providing visibility to a commonly concealed community. This commonly concealed community includes people who do not conform to, identify with, and/or present themselves within the constraints of gendered binaries. Boldly expressing and situating myself within the exhibition space is rebelliously unapologetic, defiant and prideful. Often underrepresented, I view my intentional choice of homogenizing normative spaces and my non-conforming ways of expression as a revolutionary act of revolting.

Rebirthday seeks to function as a form of self-fashioned sanctuary for non-normative people. Though rooted in my own personal identity, providing visibility to a commonly concealed community allows my thesis project to embody a broader significance beyond myself. *Rebirthday* reminds us to question how we reside in space, of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with.³⁰ The inherent reflectiveness of *Rebirthday* intends to reconsider, reimagine, and review how we reveal ourselves to each other.

³⁰ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. p. 1.

Rebirthday remains actively aware of and understands that using items of material culture as avenues of expressing my gender, queerness, and identity is not passive. Through this active awareness, I hold a mirror in front of myself. Thus, reflecting the person I present to the world every day.

Every day I am provided with an opportunity to be figuratively rebirthed. This opportunity presents itself in the way I choose to conduct my life via the choices I make. These choices include my dress, make-up, verbal speech inflections, self-fashioning, mannerisms, and state of mind.

For me, *rebirthday* is every day.

I am performing at all times; my life alive, is a live performance.

Staging my exhibition *Rebirthday* at the Graduate Gallery at OCAD University would have enabled me to create a social space for art to reside where contemporary art practices can challenge conventional exhibition structures. In this way, *Rebirthday* had the potential to become a creative site of production, thus opening the door to transformation and collaboration. By opening doors, *Rebirthday* pulls back the curtain and lets people in.

Letting People In / Danny Welsh / 2020

Self-affirmed, certain.

I will let people in.

Pull back the curtain...

You are welcomed, within.

Self-proclaimed fame.

No shame.

Unchained, I will not be tamed.

Rearrange! Accept change.

Me? Serendipitously in-between infinity.

Divinity. My name is Her Majesty.

Previously, I have performed for myself privately, entirely for me.

Now, I perform me publicly for an audience to see.

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