

Transformation of Self: Social Examination of Kink and Art  
Terminal Project Report  
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This writing couldn't be possible without the help of my friends and family. Thanks to my little brother Q, Lady Luna, Willow, and Lil B. Thanks to Audrey for putting up with all this and always showing me the context of my ideas. Thanks to my committee for bearing with me.

## Transformation of Self: Social Examination of Kink and Art

My studio practice is a combination of paintings, performance, and sculpture that explores the changing concepts of fetishism and kink in contemporary culture. Kink<sup>1</sup> describes people's non-normative sexual practices, gender identities, and behaviors. Fetish defines an array of sexual preference for objects and materials.<sup>2</sup> Kinksters form groups around fetishized practices that become syncretic, performative, and transformational. However the journey of self realization for a kinkster is complicated. Holding on to alternate identity, fetish or kink through everyday life is fraught with anxiety. From the limited research on kink we know two things, most fetishists realize their fetish early in life and its uncommon to "out grow" their kink.<sup>3</sup> This leads to the formation of groups and communities. Connected through the internet and spread out across the world, kinksters connect to support each other, find partners, and share culture. Communities are based around events where the full expression of alternative identities can happen. Play within these events is where the most visible aspect of kink takes place. This is achieved through appearance and invisibly through the suspension of disbelief. This is often called headspace<sup>4</sup>, or the space one occupies psychically while engaged in play. Kinksters who seek to become animal for instance, do so through costuming and role play. Furies<sup>5</sup> part of the Furry Fandom and animal role players like Puppy Players, not only have specific clothing. but also believe



A Furry friend *Neopantiger*,

<sup>1</sup> Rothstein, Edward. "What's Latex Got to Do With It?" *Nytimes.com*. October 5, 2007. Accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Steele, Valerie. *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

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<sup>4</sup> Pup Sparky, Sean. "Leatherati Woof Series: Pup Headspace Part 1." *Leatherati.com*. August 14, 2014. Accessed May 4, 2105.

<sup>5</sup> Patten, Fred. "Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996." *Flayrah.com*. July 15, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2015.

their roles, becoming animal both psychically and mentally.

In Deleuze & Guattari's, *A Thousand Plateaus* they posture the individual as consistently transformational, always in flux. Through a series "becoming" people are never at rest, never fully one thing, but always in transition or between states. "Becoming-animal is only one becoming among others. A kind of order or apparent progression can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child; becoming-animal, -vegetable, or -mineral; becomings-molecular of all kinds, becomings-particles." <sup>6</sup> Here they set up a notion of fluidity and instability of not just a sexual or gender spectrum but one of identity. The flow of this quote is one of microscopic. It's a zooming in, almost too literal, to explain that we are all these things: atom and molecule, the same ones that make up everything else in the world.

Through this lens, instability of self is essential to the concept of self both visible and invisible. The aesthetic of my work tires to convey what this semi-transparent space kinksters occupy looks like. For instance, *Playing Puppy* is a body of six sculptures of a pack of dogs in expressive postures. The sculptures become playful within the relationships between the animals. The bodies are wood painted white, geometric and planar, that contrast the colored heads. This alludes to the differentiation between head and body or the transformed physic ego and the physical "truth" of the body. These differences are issues of identity. Wanting to become animal is a strange idea, one that takes effort and space, somewhere one can become mentally and physically the other they are trying to become. This space becomes more apparent with my work paired with *Playing Puppy, Calico (my first girl clothes)*. A series of four large reflective gold paintings, they hang behind the dogs framing their existence through reflection. Floral shapes pattern the surface of the works, squeezing the viewer between abstract marks. This squeezing and reflection serves as metaphor for the pressures of the social reality of identity.

What is this identity shift? Is it pretend? Or is it acting? What makes a theatrical production different then a convention of Furrries? Of course the answer partially lies in the intention of Furrries and kinksters. They aren't performing for any audience, as it's an intrinsic search for self. Deleuze and Guattari continue their exploration of this idea through the example of Robert De Niro:

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "Memories of a Molecule." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 300. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

“The actor Robert De Niro walks "like" a crab in a certain film sequence; but, he says, it is not a question of his imitating a crab; it is a question of making something that has to do with the crab enter into composition with the image, with the speed of the image. That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule. You become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog. Man does not become wolf, or vampire, as if he changed molar species; the vampire and werewolf are becomings of man, in other words, proximities between molecules in composition, relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between emitted particles.”<sup>7</sup>

Through this example a picture starts to emerge. Not of a person pretending to be dog or animal, but becoming Furry or becoming Puppy Player. The kinkster is much more about the idea of Furry than the idea of actual dog. These are inventions all there own, abstracted from the original concept of dog

into a form of culture that allows people seek and connect with others through pretending to be a dog.

But what motivates people to such great effort to become something other than what they are? Judith Butler would say that the presupposed “original” this question sets up, is a simulacra to begin with. And that gender, at the heart of our identities, is essentially drag; A performance of an idealized self that is unattainable.



*Playing Puppy*, 2015 sorry foam, latex paint, wood, dimensions variable

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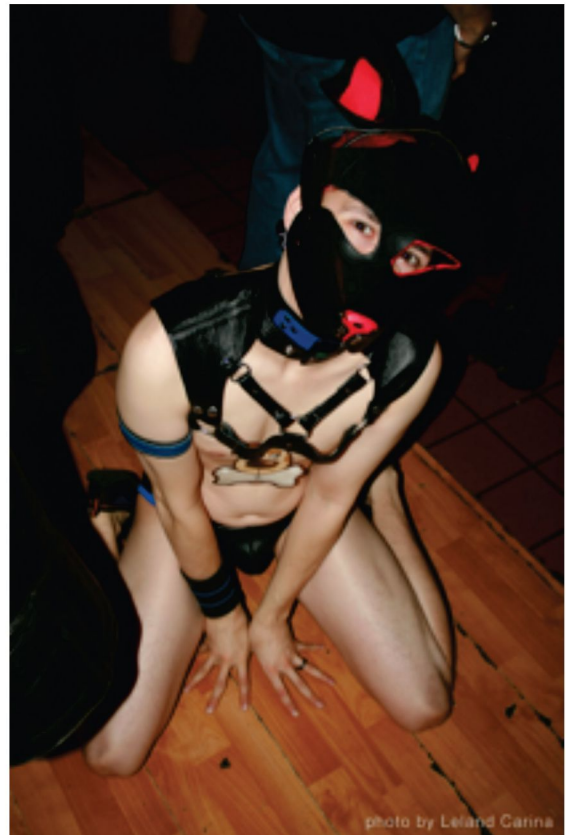
<sup>7</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "Memories of a Molecule." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 303. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

“To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that ‘imitation’ is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarism, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome. . . . that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is constantly haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself” (Bodies that Matter).<sup>8</sup>

This sets up the stage for self idealization, where one is not trying to become “who they are”, but realize that identity is flux, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, a series of “becomings”. The person is “beset” with anxiety constantly trying to be something they can never. It’s no wonder that people would want to become something else. The unconscious individual is trying in vein to become his or herself and the conscious realizes that becoming *is* identity, that the possibilities are open.

The first time I can remember my own gender coming into question was when I received a pair of leggings from a lover while studying in Scotland. It didn’t occur to me that it was possible to wear

another gender’s clothes. They have come to embody an understanding of my identity as fluid and changing, much like the wearing of clothes, like a costume in a performance as Butler describes above. As a fetish object they become a symbol of gender and sexuality that was seemingly unattainable. This became the basis for my work *Calico (my first girl clothes)*. New media artist Jacobly Satterwhite



Pup Tahoe, winner of the 2014 Oregon Puppy Contest

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<sup>8</sup> Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of Sex*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011. 126.



*Calico (My first girl clothes) 2015, latex paint, Mylar, industrial foam, 96 x 96 in*

recently remarked in an interview, “I want the most personal aspect of my life to be the focus of my work...for it to come from a place of obsession and necessity.”<sup>9</sup> I share this sentiment but it isn’t easy. Until now I was never able to reveal, express, and eventually begin understanding. Satterwhite’s performances are queer, gender fluid, and draw from vouging<sup>10</sup>, a form of dance originating in the Harlem ballroom scene and markably queer, shown in *Pairs is Burning* (1990)<sup>11</sup>. By performing these actions outside their sanctioned areas of existence (the gay scene) into the streets of New York City, Satterwhite crosses worlds; niche to public. He is one of my very few examples I have that's a model

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<sup>9</sup> Jacolby Satterwhite *Dances with His Self*. Art 21, 2013. Film.

<sup>10</sup> "Vogue (dance)." Wikipedia. November 10, 2010. Accessed May 12, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> *Paris Is Burning*. Miramax Films, 1991. Film.

for the kind of interaction. His performance and video works combine his interest into psychedelic futuristic montage reclaiming spaces in his past, rectifying them by “queering” them. A video of a family barbecue when he was six where he was told he couldn’t dance like the girls, becomes fertile ground for his work. Similarly, my paintings come from my past experiences in an effort to reclaim and reveal my own attractions and becomings.

Satterwhite delineates space both physically with dancing and virtually/ conceptually with his video work. When he uses the word “queering” he means a reclaiming of space, going back in his life and taking memories that made him think he shouldn’t be behaving the way he was because he didn’t fit the norm. Hakim Bey’s descriptions of Temporary Autonomous Zones<sup>12</sup> mirror Satterwhite’s invisible claims to space. I am extrapolating from Bey’s observations of the tension between the State ( he uses State as the idea of the power that controls people and their behavior, similar to Butler’s use of norms ) and the individual because he sets up TAZs to be purposefully enigmatic. The definition of TAZ is wide open, Bey states: “In fact I have deliberately refrained from defining the TAZ--I circle around the subject, firing off exploratory beams. In the end the TAZ is almost self-explanatory. If the phrase became current it would be understood without difficulty...understood in action.”<sup>13</sup>. The ellipses before “understood in action” is an acknowledgement to the power of these ideas, which could be used positively or negatively. With the vagueness of this explanation couldn’t a TAZ be anything? Like a dinner party for example it is a group of people getting together creating a space of their own. But two things are characteristic of TAZ-the need to be outside the confines of regular social rules and that TAZs aren’t utopic because they end. This is the lynch pin of his model; ending. TAZ’s end purposefully, to avoid detection and remain invisible as to be a force which cannot be confronted. They are in flux, appearing and disappearing. The idea of TAZ is then similar to kink and identity, so much of it is unseen. Events happen and then disappear without becoming known. The regulatory powers of social norms like institutions and the state have to be avoided or kinksters risk becoming pathologized. They exist to delineate space where transformation of self can occur. And they’re linked together by people who are resisting the social conventions they don’t fit into.

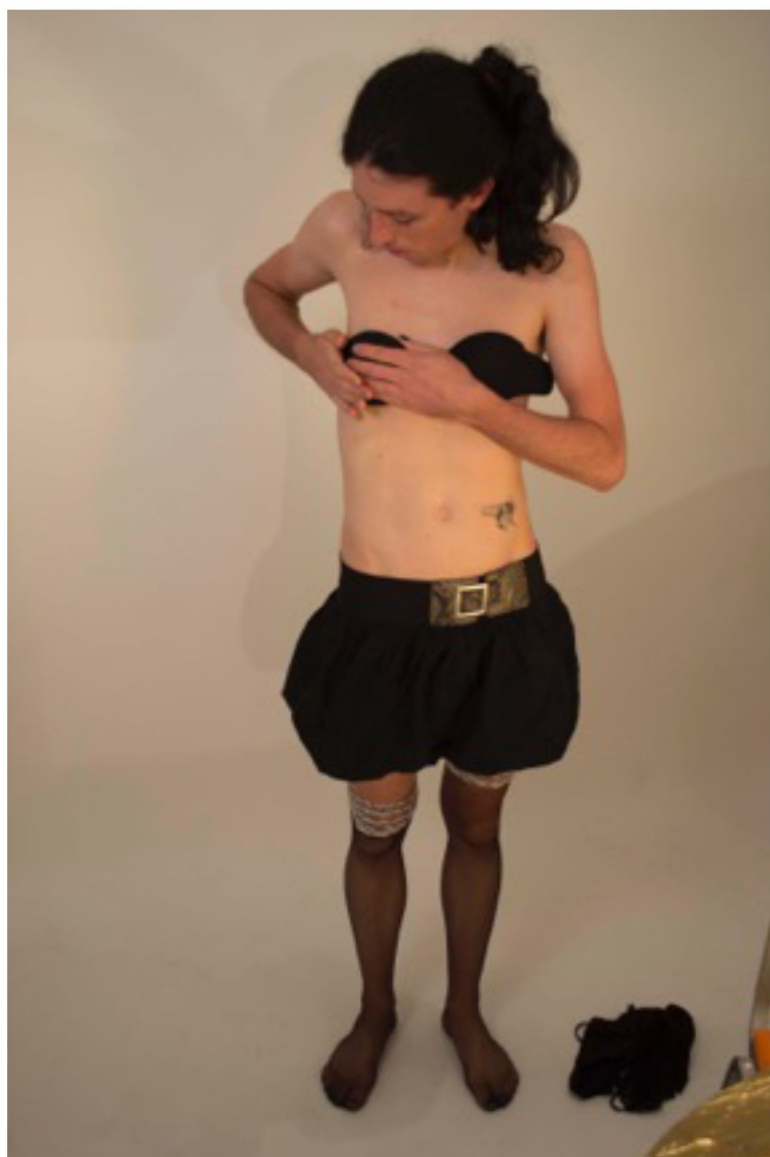
Physical artworks are sadly not a TAZ. Objects can only serve to inform people of the space

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<sup>12</sup> Bey, Hakim. T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone. Autonomedia, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Bey, Hakim. "Pirate Utopias." In T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone. Autonomedia, 1991.

where they are creating context. However, this context can motivate people to constellate a TAZ or give people the feeling or idea that difference has occurred. Understanding, like coming to know my pair of yellow leggings, is the beginning of self realization. Taking my experience with this item of clothing and transforming it into painting is how art can play a role in changing oppressive normality. Interacting with the works gives people a safe opportunity to dip their toes into experiences they have not had, and existences they have not experienced. My paintings *Calico (my first girl clothes)* is a work meant to create a lasting impression. Four sheer gold eight foot panels reflect the room within them, the reflection squeezed in between the painted fauna undulating on the surface. You, the viewer, are in this reflection, not at first because it takes time to see the reflection within the mass of abstract pinks and greens. The paint resists the surface riding on top of it in visual purgatory, the gestalt of background and foreground becomes fuzzy, the room reflected creates depth that is immediately canceled out by the lace like paint. The paint an object in and of itself. Bodily. Both an actuality and a metaphor for the interaction of self and the reflected, reenacted identity performance. Paint signifies both flower and “itself”. It becomes bodily, pushing us toward our experience of mortality. Mortality is the realization of yourself as TAZ, predicated on an end. There are two modes of reversal in these paintings – the pushing as the result of the abject forms, and the pushing, or reflective quality of the gold mylar.



*Shave, Pluck, Sitck, Pull (Awkward First CD)*, 2014 120min performance  
forever 21 skirt, Anne’s tights, Anne’s bra, eyebrow tweezers, razor, shaving cream, panties





*Bound 2*, 2014 103min performance, brown shag carpet, lace Walmart tights, adult baby romper from Baby Jeffy, leather jacket section, ribbon

Spatial depth becomes an examination of interiority as a consequence of this reversal.

My colleague writing under the pen name Lil B theorizes about the beginnings of transformation. Both Bey and Butler describe the experience of difference and explain its existence and importance, but what is the division between normality and kink? Do people migrate through this barrier? Lil B writes, “Clothing can serve as a gateway to an experience, even if the dressing is stereotyped or poorly understood at first. Letting oneself use ribbons in their hair or fingernail polish for the first time (regardless of gender identity), puts us on track to discovering how that thing integrates into our everyday personality and identity.”<sup>14</sup> It can even imprint on your the memory of the clothing like the leggings did to me. They were bright yellow with a hint of ocher, a ribbed fabric that stretched over my legs, and had a small floral print over them. Small red flowers with green leaves. Just two small shapes to signify the image of a flower. The pattern is visually intriguing in that the small

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<sup>14</sup> B, Lil. *Fetishistic Vestisms*. 2015.

pattern over the surfaces verges on a gestalt; optical mixing with the base background color subtly shifting the colors of the flower pattern on top. For me one article of clothing became the catalyst for years of exploration of self. I would hope that this could happen for others. But what about the leggings specifically made them any different from any other pair of clothes? What about this experience could I share with others? I think it was in the realization of transformation, that transformation wasn't as esoteric as I thought, that the awkwardness I felt was from thinking I was the wrong shaped peg that didn't fit into the norm of early twenties masculinity in America. Flowers don't fit and neither do leggings. The paintings reflect this on to you.

Artistic performance like Satterwhite's does create a TAZ. Through his movements and costuming he delineates space that is segmented from norms through difference. In this space he is no longer "himself" but the avatar he conjures. In my own performance work I incorporate clothing and *being*. *Bound I* and *Bound II* are lengthy durational performances where I am wrapped in cling wrap lying on the floor. In *Bound II* I am lying in the middle of a rectangular orangey brown shag carpet, wrapped in plastic. Three items of clothing adorn my bound body, my legs fit through one leg hole of a pair of black tights, an adult sized baby romper fits around my torso, and my head is covered with a square of leather, my mouth poking through an open zipper. Experiencing this as a viewer is unsettling, there is the awkwardness of the garb, the empathy for my helplessness, and not knowing if anything will happen. I wiggle slightly now and then, but most of the duration is occupied by just *being*. While bound I remember hearing a visiting artist ask Carla Begnston, "Is anything going to happen?" The space of not performing highlights the preformativity of the everyday. Not meeting this expectation leads one to speculate about my existence with more scrutiny. The clothes serving as a metaphor for different identities with all of them haphazardly attached to my body, I don't exactly fit into any of them, much like the awkwardness some feel inside their own skin. However the space around me becomes my own, I am at once helpless, dependent on another for my eventual escape, and at the same time command the carpet around me through my existence.

My body becomes a signifier for experience. My own experience within different kink communities and my understanding of others experiences, through my clothing and behavior. In my paintings, I try to pass on the headspace found within transitioning identities, like gender fluidity, to an audience who many not have experienced anything like this. By projecting the flowers in the paintings onto the audience through their reflection, they reach out and interact. The puppy sculptures highlight

the anxiety that is felt with the suspension of disbelief one uses to become animal. The dislocation of self can feel dysmorphic<sup>15</sup>, where your self image doesn't match your outward appearance. Thus the starkness of the difference between head and body in the sculptures. However the postures communicate the intention of interaction that each dog projects. Through this web of interconnection, the dogs no longer subscribe to a binary dominate and submissive relationship. Together my practice begins to uncover more of this hidden world showing that fetish is not a sexual deviancy but an intrinsic part of peoples lives stemming from the awkward way we view the gendered body. And that it is meaningful, in that it can show us ways to become, pushing us out of the binary into the multiplicities that is the actuality of contemporary social existence.

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<sup>15</sup> Extrapolation of Body Dismorphic Disorder [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body\\_dysmorphic\\_disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_dysmorphic_disorder)

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