Transcending Binaries
Presented in conjunction with Images Festival
Sarah D'Angelo, Adriana Disman, Nathan Flint, Bronwen Deurbrouck, Peter Rahul, and Quinn Robertson
Curated by Adrienne Crossman
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How does an artist explore the idea of a post-binary world within the confines of digital media – a medium that is at its origin built on a binary language? What does it look like to operate in between/outside of the "either" "or"? *Transcending Binaries* attempts to answer these questions through installation, live performance, and video. Artists Sarah D'Angelo, Adriana Disman, Nathan Flint, Bronwen Deurbrouck, Peter Rahul, and Quinn Robertson explore what it means to occupy and create productive spaces in which post-binary transgressions occur.

Sarah D'Angelo's *Mall Videos* challenge the social landscape of cis-gendered advertising in North American shopping malls. The three videos consists of a genderqueer figure navigating downtown malls while trying on gendered clothing and posing in front of heteronormative advertising. Questioning from a queer perspective, the series explores what happens to an ambiguous body inside such a hyper-gendered space as a shopping mall; a space in which normative gender is so acutely commodified.

Nathan Flint's *Portrait of the Artist as a Hard Drive* is a further exploration of identity formation through the accumulation and consumption of media and popular culture. A near life-sized projection features the moving silhouette of the artist comprised of a variety of video content from Flint's personal digital database. The piece proposes an analogous relationship between constructed identity and media consumption through collected digital artifacts. Home movies, independent and major motion pictures, YouTube videos and pornography all become the substance of the body. While the projected silhouette of the artist moves within the frame, the body itself becomes the point at which countless video streams flow together. This flow causes the already obstructed source material to blend, making it difficult to distinguish one stream from another, providing a glimpse of the artist's personal and queer digital archive that together forms his virtual self-image.

During her performance[1], Adriana Disman will explore the precarity, complexity and discomfort of "passing" in terms of her race and sexual orientation. More specifically,

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[1] Disman's performance will take place at Xpace on Saturday, April 26th.

Disman's piece will explore the complicated relationship the artist has with passing as both heterosexual and as white, and how this affects how she navigates the world in relation to her personal identity as a queer non-white woman, versus her perceived identity. The performance will consist of a meditation on the feeling one gets directly before falling, or during the fall itself: not quite in one state or the other, but occupying the spaces in between. Disman's work plays with the tension of these dualities; of feeling stuck while simultaneously in transition between categories, always in flux but never residing. Both preceding and following the performance a single cube of ice will melt on a plinth each day for the duration of the exhibition. The ice is intended to stand in for a precarious body in Disman's absence. It takes on multiple states as it melts, moving from solid, to liquid and then eventually, evaporating into the air. In this way the flux that Disman attempts to perform with her physical body is mirrored by the ice as it melts.[2]

Disman's performance explores the complex facet of queer identity in relation to visibility versus invisibility, and what it means for one's ability to pass as straight (normal), and whether passing is even desired. Queer theorist Sarah Schulman describes the act of 'coming out' as "a process of self-interrogation in opposition to social expectation that has no parallel in heterosexual life".[3] Michael Warner refers to the process as "itself a political strategy," adding that "queer people are a kind of social group fundamentally unlike others, a status group only insofar as they are not a class".[4]

Inspired by the ever-expanding world of virtual social environments, Bronwen Deurbrouck and Quinn Robertson's interactive avatar modification installation is a queer response to the history of normative character creation in digital media. The installation consists of several monitors arranged in a "U" formation, displaying character/avatar modification processes from a number of different virtual games. In the centre of the semi circle stands a computer monitor and mouse connected to software developed by the artists that allows the user to explore genderqueer and non-binary identity creation through customizable avatars. The work opens up a broadened range of possibilities in the creation of post-gender, post-human bodies while providing a refreshing take on non-normative bodies within gaming culture; virtual spaces in which binary choices pervade.

Peter Rahul's video installation *Modem Mantra* ponders the spiritual connection between the physical and digital self. The digitally produced video plays on an antique CRTC monitor highlighting the connection between past and present. The work displays a meditating figure, made up of vividly coloured pixels, floating within the frame, abstracting completely then reappearing. Although silent, the pace of the video is set to an Internet dial up tone, bringing to mind the meditative and nostalgic mantra of a generational misfit; the 90s child who neither identifies as online or offline.

By queering the binary divisions of constructed normative identities, these works begin to dismantle the hierarchical power structures that enforce them. Here, normal assumes a

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[2] The sculptural component of this work is a collaborative piece between Disman and Danièle Bourque under the name DnA.
[3] Schulman, Sarah. *Ties Tthat Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences*. New York: The New York Press, 2009. Print.
[4] Warner, Michael. "From Fear of a Queer Plant." *The material queer: a LesBiGay cultural studies reader*. 1st ed. Donald E. Morton. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996. Print.

white heterosexuality, and forces an othering on those that don't fit that mold. By challenging the definitions of undesirable vs. desirable bodies the illusion of 'normalcy' is broken and the lack of discernable borders revealed. As Audre Lorde points out, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change".[5] It is for this reason why it is not only important for one to be able to choose their identity within binary categories, but also to have the ability to exist outside of these constructed divisions. Laura Mulvey describes this as the "thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive of a new language of desire".[6] To challenge these dominant ideologies, we must call into question what constitutes normative identity while creating new languages and modes of desire.

-Adrienne Crossman

[5] Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House"*. Crossing Press, 2007. Print.

[6] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Ed. Amelia Jones. *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 44-53. Print.