

By way of introduction today I shall say that The Party is a spongy polyvalent assemblage. The Party includes: myself - Kyla Gardiner; Layla Marcelle Mrozowski - who couldn't be here today but sends her love; and Suzy. The Party just completed a collaborative MFA here at the School for Contemporary Arts.

I have put these words into the form of a letter, as I often do. Partly I am interested in how the epistolary form might make the labour that is produced by close relationships more perceptible, and partly I am interested in ways of activating intimacy and care in academic and institutional practices. Further, I feel it maintains the spirit of The Party's commitment to collaboration and consensual plagiarism that my participation in this conversation today alludes to the relations and encounters that constitute me. It is improbable to footnote each lusty deposit and residue left within you by your intimates and influencers; letter writing allows me to recognize through address, while eliding the authorial individualism of citation.

Dear Adventurer,

These ideas, which I have been tonguing in my mouth for the past few years, trying to dislodge like a blackberry seed stuck in my teeth, are owed in large part to our late night lip flapping. Thank you. And thank you fellow participants, and thank you symposium organizers.

We joked last week that I should get a T-shirt that says "I'm so queer when you hire me... I pay you". It's true that I have often been hired onto projects as a designer that I end up going out of pocket on. When I set a fee to my labour I often feel that it inaccurately suggests that a dollar sign is indicative of worth. My creative labour output is quantized in a system that does not account for the assemblages that co-constitute this labour. Adventurer, your strong coffee and the indigo July shadows we share will be vital to the next lighting design I do, but I will not itemize these on my next invoice.

But when I work for free, when I labour for love, there is no pretense that my agency is contained in my body alone, and that my body converts easily to earnings. Rather my body is spent, I am deficit, and my collaborators and I are in consensual debt. Yet the impossibility of repayment or of even tracking the exchanges is what predicates friendship and, in my mind, creative desire. I both feel that I can never demonstrate to you my affection, and am constantly compelled to revel in the demonstration.

There is a danger in suggesting that a queer form of performance making within a capitalist system is to take it in the ass. Artists and labourers in performance struggle, often profoundly, to subsist within the current economic framework, let alone to thrive. There is an argument to be made that if we don't participate and fight for our place, in the current equation of labour exchange we are being commoditized, instrumentalized and objectified. Resistance, in this model, merely greases the pleasure of the powerful. The risk of devaluing labour by working for free in a market that is rabid for excuses to pay artists less should be considered. However, I am interested in taking seriously the idea that getting fucked can be re-positioned as a positive metaphor. The Party asks the question: *What would a form of performance that embraced objectification and eschewed subjectification look like?*

This is a tactic that still makes me queasy. So much integral, life-saving, and transformative feminist, queer and labour activism has been geared toward gaining access to the status of "subject". The enabling power of objects to produce subjects is a poor consolation prize to those of us who have been excluded from the position of political subject. Would a form of performance that embraced objectification necessarily be at the subject's expense?

Deleuze and Guattari write that "the pack" or "the multiplicity" escapes divisibility through transformation: "Thus packs, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other... This is not surprising, since becoming and multiplicity are the same thing. A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, not by a center of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension *without changing its nature.*"<sup>1</sup>

As a designer who just completed an arts degree I have been often asked to justify my work in terms of my voice, my vision, my ownership. I worked on fourteen different performance pieces while in school and each time I did a well-meaning faculty member would ask me, "Yes, but – is it *your* work?" Now that I am out of school, the measure of success is still "Are you doing *your* work?"

And the answer is no. I am not doing my work. The work is never mine, because I am part of a pack. As a designer, my identity is transformed by the multiplicity. My choices arise from the assemblage of humans and objects and geographies of any given project. I attempt a becoming with the creative team, and with the audience. My paw prints

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 249.

might remain distinctive but tracking my individual agency is to miss my real power. “Yes but - is it *your* work?” No, I gave the work away.

A form of performance that eschews subjectification starts from the multiplicity, and from an abundance of labour that cannot be inventoried. This form of performance requires that we take more responsibility for things while taking less credit. It requires that we address ourselves to the dear, and sometimes that we give it away. This is part of why The Party gifts party favours at all of our shows.

Anyway – obviously I’m still working through these ideas. I’d love to hear what you think, as always. Hope you’re having a great day.

Kyla