QUEER UTOPIA AND REPARATION: RECLAIMING FAILURE, VULNERABILITY, AND SHAME IN DRAG PERFORMANCE

By
Rodrigo Peroni

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Critical Gender Studies.

Supervisor: Professor Eszter Timár

Second Reader: Erzsébet Barát

Budapest, Hungary
2017

Abstract

This thesis discusses the critical and queer utopian potential of two performances by Ongina and Alaska Thunderfuck - two contemporary American drag queens. Based on Ongina's "Beautiful" lip-sync performance and Alaska Thunderfuck's "Your Makeup Is Terrible" video clip, I argue that the performance of failure, vulnerability, and shame troubles multiculturalist discourses for their perpetuation of the neoliberal and masculinist values of individual success (chapter 1), authentic autonomy (chapter 2), and proud stable identity (chapter 3). While and because these performances defy the drag genre's conventions and drive us to reconsider the prevalent forms of resistance to heterosexism, they also engender a queer utopian potential that allows the imagining and experiencing of alternative ethics. I rely on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification and Eve Sedgwick's notions of paranoid and reparative reading to propose queer communitarian bondings that are not radical nor durable but more inclusive and self-transformative.

By interpreting ugliness as failure, I argue that in uglifying themselves Ongina and Alaska expose the meritocracy of neoliberalism and suggest an ethics based not on aesthetic pleasure but on a reparative appreciation of the awful that queers the very notion of community for not holding on to stable identities nor individual achievements. Drawing on a Levinasian discussion of vulnerability and care, I discuss how Alaska disidentifies with the reality TV show RuPaul's Drag Race's deployment of vulnerability as relatable authenticity while suggesting an alternative ethics with which to encounter the Other based on witnessing, risk, and ungraspability. In turn, the affect of shame, as delineated by Silvan Tomkins, is reconsidering in its performativity: Ongina challenges the ideological rhetoric of multiculturalism that positions pride and shame in a binary relation of visibility and invisibility and engender communitarian bonds based on depressive love.

Finally, this study provided a discussion of the shortcomings of multiculturalist identitarian politics in regard to its assimilationist and exclusionary logics; and imagined alternative queer horizons where ethical responsibility does not follow from individual sameness but from the unevenness of our relationships.

Acknowledgements

I could not have asked for a supervisor more passionate about theorizing and writing about queer stuff: mutual admiration and shared excitement were the ingredients we used for believing we were making something meaningful while enjoying the process meanwhile.

Scholarly work can be painfully lonesome, especially when done away from family, but thanks to CEU's supportive community I believe I am part of a bigger political project worth investing in. Finally, I would like to thank especially Kiel for having endured with me and made deadlines seem less frightening.

Finally, I am also immensely grateful to my parents and partner for all the support and care they provided me while distant in these two years of studies - with their encouragement and affection I was able to pursue my dream, and to feel I can count on them drives me forward.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL RESEARCH AND THE WORD COUNT

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 29,064 words
Entire manuscript: 34,989 words

Signed _____ (Rodrigo Peroni)

Table of Contents

Introduction

The two drag queen performances I analyze in this thesis (lyrics present in the appendix) begin with impersonations of glamorous and prideful divas, following the conventions of the drag genre. Halfway through the acts these empowered personas are disidentified with once the performers fall to the ground instead of rising above their opponents; they fail in meeting the expectations of beauty, they expose their vulnerability and live their shame on stage to the delight and horror of the audience. Using camp humor and tragic overperformance, both acts perform a parody of the empowered, autonomous diva (which, I will argue, stands in for the multicultural model of selfhood): the former by playing with the tone of the performance (from tragic to melodramatic, from an authentic expression of oneself to a mockery of its own claims and a deployment of enhanced artificiality) and the latter by an ironic disjuncture between performance and song through a translocation of affects.

In this thesis, based on Ongina's "Beautiful" lip-sync performance and Alaska Thunderfuck's "Your Makeup Is Terrible" video clip, I argue that the performance of failure, vulnerability, and shame trouble multiculturalist discourses for their perpetuation of the neoliberal and masculinist values of individual success (chapter 1), authentic autonomy (chapter 2), and proud stable identity (chapter 3). While and because these performances defy the drag genre's conventions and drive us to reconsider the prevalent forms of resistance to heterosexism, they also engender a queer utopian potential that allows the imagining and experiencing of queer communities. I rely on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification and Eve Sedgwick's notions of paranoid and reparative reading to put forward a discussion on how we can imagine a risky, insufficient, and contingent attachment to each other that resists a multiculturalist[1] discourse on the "celebration of diversity". That is, these performances provide a way of imagining the constitution of ephemeral and (im)provisional communities based on transformative encounters with unpredictable outcomes among ungraspable singularities instead of associative connections among discrete ontologies which are preserved through the process.

In this Introduction, first I present the queer enterprise of reclaiming notions and practices that are repudiated by contemporary identity politics. Also, I present David Halperin's critique to the gay community and its ethical bases. Then, besides defining the three major concepts I am

[1] I deal with multiculturalism in my work following what Muñoz names a liberal and reductive form of "multicultural pluralism", or "corporate multiculturalism", in opposition to a critical and "radical multiculturalism" (which is compatible with an intersectional approach). For him, "multicultural pluralism disarms the politics of specificity. Multicultural pluralism's rhetoric of inclusion homogenizes difference. Difference becomes part of the race, class, and gender mantra, essentially a form of sloganeering" (p.167).

operating in this thesis (failure, vulnerability, and shame), I discuss how drag queens have been criticized as inherently misogynist, romanticized as a site of subversion of gender norms, and finally comprehended on their complex political ambivalence by third-wave feminists; as well as I provide an overview of the scholarship on camp humor. I then move on to present the performances I analyze while discussing the methods used to interpret them. Finally, I present an outline of each chapter and some limitations of my project.

The Ethico-Political Project of Feminist Queer Critique

My thesis is committed to imagining alternative relationalities and ways of being in the world that seek less to preserve a sovereign sense of selfhood than to instantiate an openness to Otherness[2] within and without the subject. Following José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) contention in the vastly cited first page of his book *Cruising Utopia* that "queerness is an ideality" which belongs to the future and holds a commitment to imagining alternative futures, a "*then and there*" that is not entrapped by the swamp of the "here and now" of presentist ideologies (p. 1). My project owes a lot to this inspiring text, which calls the reader to "dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (p. 1). Against what he calls the anti-relational turn in queer studies, Muñoz insists that queerness and utopia have all to do with each other because queerness points out that the world is not enough and propels us onwards - and that in the aesthetic (and queer aesthetics in particular) we may find a hint of where to go to.

In this line, my thesis discusses ways of engaging in relationality that restrains the assignment of value (morality) based on anti-normative deployments of negative concepts that expose and expand whom counts for ethical consideration[3] and on which bases (ethics). That is, instead of prescribing alternative sets of (moral) criteria for evaluating subjects as fitting or unfitting, this project sketches possible non-hegemonic modes of togetherness, belonging, and responsibility with which to queer experiences of connectivity by taking into account anti-identitarian performances of dependency and reliance on recognition. According to Margrit Shildrick (2002):

> One significant achievement of postmodernism and its feminist uptake has been to deconstruct the rigidity of both the mind/body split, and the postEnlightenment model of an autonomous, fully self-present, and

[2] When using the term "Other" I refer to the remainder of identity formation process that insists on reminding the "one" of its own limits and lacks, a virtual field of turbulence of boundaries.

[3] That is, the attribution of relevance to the other as a result of a (more or less) meticulous attention provided to the specificity of their necessities.

> invulnerable subject, in favour of undecidable and fluid forms of embodiment that frustrate the mirroring of the selfsame (p.119).

For me, the post-structuralist feminist project overlaps and integrates with queer critique because both political projects are particularly keen to the postmodern praising of fluidity and indeterminacy for their anti-hegemonic potential. The feminine, when mobilized as a refusal of unitary coherence, can be said to have queer effects of anti-normative resistance, and the queer, as a boundary-troubling excess, can be said to hold the promise of a feminist upheaval of binary formations.

In 1976 Michel Foucault (1988) publishes his influential critique of liberationist movements: according to him, the Civil Rights movements that emerged by that time, as well as Psychoanalysis and other discourses, subscribed to a Victorian repressive hypothesis of sexuality according to which sex, posed as the utmost truth of the subject, is inhibited, restrained, and suppressed by moral codes of civilization and decency. The argument goes that identity-affirming politics end up reinforcing the naturalness of sex by way of referring to it as an essential drive that must be loosen from the constraints of a prohibiting power for the sake of emancipation.

Foucault's theory is central to the development of queer critique, which emerges in the 1980's among the AIDS crisis in the US to counter assimilationist gay pride politics which aimed at normalization and assimilation of the (re-)stigmatized homosexual subjects into the morality of straight society at the expense of a culture of promiscuous, public, and/or anonymous sex. David Halperin (2012) links the promise of sexual assimilation provided by gay identity to the one provided by romantic love in that both "offer us a way to represent our desires in public without displaying too much queerness, and it repackage gay eroticism in an honorable, dignified, socially accredited form. (…) Romance redeems homosexuality" (p.285).

Halperin makes comprehensive discussion of gay male cultural practices in his book *How to be Gay,* where he argues that the task for queer politics is to redeem certain of its "pre-Stonewall" and "feminized" aspects (like camp) from the contemporary trend towards normalization and assimilation. In his words, "gay culture is what many of us must disavow in order to achieve gay pride—at least, a certain kind of gay pride." (p.219). For him,

> Instead of running from the specter of gay male gender deviance, being ashamed of it, greeting it with stubborn and stolid silence or denial, and consigning it to homosexuality's newly built closet, we need to continue—in a spirit of unprejudiced and panic-free inquiry —to inquire into the meaning of gay male femininity, without fearing that any investigation of it will necessarily return us to homophobic clichés about our abnormal psychology (p.321).

Queer critique commences by provisionally embracing the homophobic claims (of homosexuals as toxic, deadly, emasculated subjects), that is, assuming they might provide a fertile ground for posing a critique to hegemonic systems of cis-hetero-phallogocentric desire and to imagine alternative embodiments of space-time, incarnations of pleasure etc. To acknowledge that the secrecy of being inside the closet might hold some potential (such as developing non-state centered forms of community care) is not to propose failure, vulnerability, and shame have any intrinsic value or that they are "good" and thus should be celebrated, but that they do hold a potential of subverting the current norms.

The queer project of reclamation in my understanding does not contribute to consolidating queer identities nor proposes any intrinsic value on whatever is being reclaimed, but signal that these practices in fact hold many political, ethical, aesthetic utopian potentials that should not be countered in the name of assimilation into the normalcy of an unjust and oppressive society. It is important to acknowledge however the allure (and, sometimes, necessity) of being considered one more among the crowd - Michael Warner (1993), in a foundational text for queer theory, is very clear in affirming that queer politics does not stand as a substitute or replacement for identity/minority-rights politics, but as to open up "new possibilities and problems" (p.xxviii).

What happens however when shame itself is reclaimed? The experience of continuous self-shaming can become sedimented to such a degree it paralyses the subject into a spiral of painful individuation, of becoming self-conscious and feeling one is not enough… But if we consider the reparative potential of a shared shame, the queer project becomes not to rehabilitate these practices foreclosed by gay politics into reasons of individual or group pride - that is, not to convert these failures (insofar as they represent the gap between expectations and reality, between the norms and the actuality) into successes - but to inhabit this shameful, questionable, disgraceful, indecent space and to negotiate our position *from* there, considering these are not the truth about our identity - not part of our authentic self that must be "released" from the constraints of identity politics - but also discursively produced like identity itself. If failure, vulnerability, and shame are repudiated by both hegemonic discourses of neoliberal subjectivity and counter-discourses of multiculturalism, exclusionary biopolitical processes are left unquestioned - that is, by reproducing its internal dislocations and othering processes, multiculturalism reproduces the exclusion of some bodies and subjectivities deemed threatening to the individual, community or nation.

I will move now to define the three major concepts I operate with in this thesis - failure, vulnerability, and shame - which disavowal by multiculturalist discursive formations constitute the condition of possibility of emergence of the neoliberal gay subject. I use neoliberalism in this thesis as a mode of subjectivation whose central values are individual productivity, ambition, and

consumption habits ("lifestyle"). Emerging on a Euro-American post-Welfare state context of privatizations, austerity measures, and gentrification of urban spaces, neoliberalism operates with a model of self-hood that stands as a manager of oneself and an entrepreneur of their own life.

Failure as a concept has been a recent topic of research, especially on post-modern art debates, disability and crip critique of usefulness, and scrutinized for exposing alternative ways of resisting the neoliberal emphasis on success - individual, corporational, and national. If the notion of failure emerges on the one hand as an unachieved goal, an unexecuted potential, an unmet standard (measured in relation to ever-changing ideals), in sum, a nonperformance that signals a lack, failure can also appear in the form of excess (too much weight, too much melanine, too much flamboyance), or when an action or process leads to an unexpected and undesired outcome: "over" performances which share with lack a particular distance from meeting expectations, an offer without demand, a surplus, an inadequateness…

Lisa Le Feuvre (2010), in discussing failure in art, proposes failure to be measured on "the gaps between intention, expectation and realization" (p.14). But whose "intention" is this? It it the author's conscious intention or the author's intention as imagined or assumed by the audience? One risk of defining failure according to volitionality is that of adding too much emphasis on the performer - as a modernist author that expresses his internal conflicts in their art - and refrains from acknowledging that failure is also ascribed retrospectively - i.e. if the failing subject did not live up to the beholder's expectations (i.e. the community norms), they *should have had* attempted to (which is not an assumption but a moral imposition). Instead, I would propose to conceive of failure by itself, with a potential for disrupting the teleology that made it recognizable in the first place. Like interpreting an art piece, each incidence of failure has a "life of its own": since the art piece is conceived as having a *body* of its own, I shall be tuned to the piece's internal dynamics that exceed the premeditations of the author(s).[4]

As I will show, failure appear as ugliness in my material: a failure (either intentional or not) of attaining beauty standards. To speak about female ugliness is different than masculine since femininity is constituted precisely through the objectification of their bodies, which are supposed to be offered to the male gaze. Sue Thornham (2007) affirms that women are understood to be "the product of artifice, without substance or identity" (p. 29), and thus fixed into their own struggle to attain the ideal image of femininity.

Such dependency on outside validation contribute to the constitution of women as constitutive vulnerable. According to Judith Butler (2014) all humans are vulnerable not only

[4] Even though the processes that constitute failure as failure (or art as art) ought to be considered and analyzed, each instance of failure can be conceptually scrutinized for its characteristics.

because of their fragile bodies but also because of their status as intrinsically social beings. She affirms that "part of what a body is (and this is for the moment an ontological claim) is its dependency on other bodies and networks of support" (p. 4). She succeeds in avoiding essentialism by conceptualizing vulnerability not as the human's fragile embodiment (as previous philosophers have done) but as the human's necessary connection to other (also vulnerable) animals (human or not) and infra-structures. For her, we are vulnerable because the bonds with those who brought us into subjective existence are vulnerable: first, because the objects of our constitutive attachments are also precariously exposed to being harmed, and second because the attachments are themselves precarious and dependent on a set of conditions to uphold themselves (Butler, 2004).

Vulnerability is a concept that started receiving special attention in the past couple of decades. From philosophical scrutinization of the implications of human fragility for the foundations of culture and politics; to Disaster Studies' concern to protect the individuals with more propensity to being affected by disasters (Frerks, Warner, and Weijs (2011)); and bioethical discussions over the populations that are more susceptible to being exploited in the context of research (ten Have, 2015); from policy making institutions like UNESCO aims to change the geopolitical conditions that led populations into situations of vulnerability; to civil society efforts to provide sustenance and support to marginal groups in precarious situations as the neoliberal precarization of state services grows. It is important to notice that vulnerability and precarity differ conceptually: while the former may be willingly "shared"[5] (with an intimate partner, for instance), the latter delves around an unmet desire for security and certainty, a lack of support, aid and protection when they are needed. [6]

As Butler (2005) reminds us, being violated exposes how fragile we are, how "none of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy" (p. 101). Being exposed is followed by the negative affect of shame in discursive formations where the neoliberal (masculine, white) model of subject hood is the norm - sovereign, autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient.

Shame and its constellation of related emotions (embarrassment, shyness, dishonor etc.) has been discussed by philosophers, theologians, sociologists, and more recently, the "psy" disciplines (Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Psychiatry). From a demonstration of "good manners" and modesty to a disciplining mechanism of (patriarchal) power, shame has been most often

[5] I put this word between inverted commas to signal that in fact I will conceptualize vulnerability not as an ontological condition but as a relational affectation, as further discussed on chapter two.

[6] Moreover, while vulnerability is more linked with a spatial economy (of what is allowed to "get in" and what is an invasion), precarity tells about a temporal situation of imminent "fall". Thus, to affirm a politics of reclaiming precarity from my position (as a middle-class scholar) would be, if not cynical, at least unfeminist.

regarded as a moving affect, one that takes the self out of the mastery over itself to contain its excesses.

The concept of shame I work with here draws on developmental psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1995), who provides a theory of nine innate affects that are expressed in the human face, being shame-humiliation the one that brings about a self-conscious experience of oneself. Eve Sedgwick (1995) finds in his oeuvre a powerful theory with which to avoid nature-culture binaries and at once considering the psychic relevance of identities and claiming their provisional aspect. Such is the ambivalence of shame Sedgwick (2003) reminds us of - shame has the reparative potential of avoiding binary thinking once it is at once a movement of hiding the face from view and a theatrical performance of exhibiting such concealment; a negative affect that carries a trace of positive attachments; Hence, shame "mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality" (p. 38).

It is important to notice that by putting such an emphasis on shame, one risks perpetuating a male middle-class model of subjectivity. While Esther Newton questions if shame is not "merely anger in middle-class clothing" (p. 34)[7], Jack Halberstam (2005) asserts that shame is an affect particularly important for the male gay subject (whose eventual sissy behavior is strictly policed and publicly shamed, in contrast with the somewhat tolerated lesbian tomboyism (p. 226)). Although I will not discuss these nuances in this project, I acknowledge that both me and the two performers I discuss here share a male middle-class positionality.

To reclaim the three notions I approach in this thesis is not elementary since they very easily can become their opposites: while reclaiming failure, there is always the risk of excelling at failing, of performing failure for an audience that seeks to see one failing masterfully on stage. Likewise, the exposure of one's own vulnerability risks being interpreted as a strong and defiant act that requires a great deal of autonomy and self-assertion. In turn, performing shame may be read[8] as a shameless act that is either shamed for being too indecent or prided upon for its boldness.

Drag Queens, Camp, and Subversion

[7] Cited in Halperin & Traub (2009)

[8] I use the terms "read", "understand", and "interpretation" interchangeably to refer to the practice of hermeneutics.

The drag subculture has been transformed in the last decade with the popularization of the American TV show RuPaul's Drag Race[9]. The show transformed the status of some drag queens from local comedians and/or performers in gay bars to international celebrities going on tours, featuring in advertisements, and, in sum, becoming celebrity stars. RuPaul shared on interviews[10] his belief that drag queens will never be "mainstream" since drag is "the anti-thesis of the matrix": "Drag says, 'Identity is a joke'". According to him, the model of ever-changing and unserious identity put forward by drag resists cooptation by the market, who requests consumers to stick to an identity. What is foreclosed by this logic is the dynamic and adaptive nature of cooptation that allows Capitalism to thrive on shifting market niches. However, as I argue in chapter 2, RuPaul's own TV show requests its contestants to present their coherent and authentic identities by way of exposing their vulnerabilities.

Carole-Anne Tyler (1991) reviews the anti-drag critiques proposed by feminists who would argue that the drag genre is inherently misogynistic: mostly drawing psychoanalytical interpretations, they accuse female impersonators of fetishizing femininity, that is, of adopting femininity just to keep the lack it represents at a distance (p. 41). This argument is based on the common practice in drag performances of activating masculine traits (i.e., the performer's hairy body or deep voice) in a mocking way and showing what underlies the "mask" of drag as the essence of their being, as the phallus. In this way, (gay men) performers are blamed of performing femininity in order to ridicule it and reinforce their own masculinity; or, alternatively, embodying the fantasy of the phallic woman (p. 42). Some of the subculture's sexism appears also in the terms used: queens who can *pass* as women are "fishy" (a term that refers to how vaginas supposedly stink); and women drag queens are called "faux" queens ("false", which affirms drag as a property of (gay) men) or "bio" queens (a transphobic term that establishes biological criteria to femaleness). I find Halperin's (2012) interpretation of the source of this misunderstanding most compelling: for him, drag parodies *femininity*, while for most of its opponents drag is interpreted to be attempting to embody, control and repudiate *femaleness* - which would constitute its misogyny. Besides, for him if the femininity displayed seems to reinforce gender stereotypes, as it is claimed, "[g]ay male culture's embrace of degrading representations of the feminine is not an endorsement of them (…) it is the beginning of a process of reversal and resignification" (p. 379 - 380).[11]

With the publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990, Judith Butler (2011) provides a new feminist take on the phenomenon, focusing on how drag makes visible the gap between body and gender,

[9] A weekly American reality show in which drag queens dispute for the title of "America's next drag superstar" that is in its 9th season (as of June-2017). I approach the TV show in more detail on chapter two.

[10] http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/rupaul-rupauls-drag-race-mainstream/story?id=39075322

[11] Some drag queens, though, do celebrate femininity: particularly, those who are called "pageant" or "beauty" queens.

denaturalizing the latter in the moment of its parodic repetition. One of the book's most discussed argument uses the genre of drag as a metaphor to impersonation and miming, which results in the thesis "gender as drag". While drag is opposed for its supposed alignment with the hegemonic discourse's depreciation of femininity (which is indeed the impression left when the irony of camp fails) Butler sees a subversive potential in these practices, interpreted as parodies of sexism itself: camp not as a simple "double" to (homophobic) ideology but a reworking of its logic from within. In each instance of repetition, difference is foregrounded through an exacerbation of theatricality, insofar as "it mimes and renders hyperbolic the discursive convention that it also reverses" (Butler, 1993, p. 233).

Drag became widely endorsed as an emblem for the queer project of promoting fluidity as if interpreting gender as a performance meant there was no psychic forces in play but simply a decision of which clothes to put on each day. Other authors though, like Leo Bersani (1995), doubted the actual efficiency of the subversiveness of parody, affirming that instead of overthrowing hegemonic norms resignification and appropriation show merely a "politically impotent disrespect" (p. 51) that leads to a reidealization of the norms. Three years later Butler (1993) publishes *Bodies that Matter* to undo some misinterpretations of her previous arguments[12]. If hasty readings of her argument aligned the exposure and denaturalization of norms with their disruption, Butler highlighted in this book that drag, as a hyperbolic allegorization of the ways heterosexual norms operate, does not necessarily subvert them: "these same norms, taken not as commands to be obeyed, but as imperatives to be 'cited', twisted, queered, brought into relief as heterosexual imperatives, are not, for that reason, necessarily subverted in the process" (p. 237). In other words, to know that the norms work through repetition and are not natural does not prevent the "knower" from subscribing to them nevertheless (a position with which I agree).

Moreover, following previous feminist arguments against drag Butler affirms that some cases of cross-dressing, especially the ones present in popular culture and performed by straight people, perpetuate and reinforce heteropatriarchal regimes of domination by performatively demonstrating how the feminine gender (reduced to its imagetic materiality) can be manipulated, worn off, fetishized and commodified at will to maintain and increase male privileges without interfering with the performer's identity - and even reassuring their authority. For Butler (1993), "a ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness" (p. 126) and that usually takes the form of affirming that drag queens

[12] See pages 230 onwards of Critically Queer, on Bodies that Matter (1993), for Butler's discussion on the misapprehension on gender performativity.

are in a sense (usually aesthetic) 'better than women'.[13] Although drag can indeed reinforce gender stereotypes and maintain heteropatriarchal systems of oppression, in the past decade or so the drag scene has seen the emergence of artists who defy its conventions (formed around the 1960's[14]) with aesthetic experimentations that blur the binary gender norms and expand the genre of drag beyond camp.[15]

Female impersonation was often theorized under the concept of "camp" aesthetic or humor, that is, a distinctly gay practice of self-parody. Camp has been variously defined as a style (when the focus is on the production) or as an interpretational lens (when reception is foregrounded). Usually described as a "gay aesthetics" because linked to drag queens (and the divas who inspire them), camp is understood to cover and hide the performer's enduring suffering resulted from living in a homophobic society - the reason being that oppression becomes easier to endure if one shows and makes fun of one's own unfortunate and precarious situation.[16] For Halperin (2012), "[t]he work of all gay male cultural politics can be summed up in a single, simple formula: to turn tragedy into melodrama." (p. 297) Camp aesthetics thus performs the self as yet another artifice: the drag performer[17] instrumentalizes his body to impersonate a feminine persona like he is coerced to pass as a straight man off-stage (in both cases, gender is context-dependent, includes a set of learned techniques, and is not an "unmediated" expression of one's "nature").

I understand performance to be an exceptional space where impersonating, embodying, and, in any case, working in a very close relationship with the material being criticized takes place. Moreover, performance is taken in this project as an exceptional space for amplifying, elaborating and (re)articulating affects, and queer performance in specific is understood as a favored space for reconsidering the directions of sexual dissidence and resistance. As a disidentificatory practice, camp acknowledges the importance of the oppressive in our constitution: since what is repudiated is first impersonated, satire gives way to self-parody. According to Halperin (2012), camp "involves not taking seriously, literally, or unironically the very things that matter most and that cause the

[13] See, for instance, *Drag U*, a reality show where drag queens are paired with women to teach them about self-care. Women's failure in self-care is used as a delegitimization of their gender, health, character etc., putting drag queens in the hierarchical position of pedagogical disciplining.

[14] Although dragging is a space for experimentation and defiance of gender norms, the circuit that was formed around it has its own strict set of rules and conventions.

[15] With the (re)appearance of a drag king scene in big cities of the Anglo-World, as well as the invention of bearded queens, or even young and slim queens who display a feminine embodiment on stage and in so doing challenge to the naturalness of sex itself (such as Violet Chachki, Valentina, and Naomi Smalls).

[16] RuPaul defends this line of thought (of camp as a strategy for dealing with suffering by taking identity and oneself less seriously) in a 2016 interview with Vulture. Accessible on http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/rupaul-drag-race-interview.html

[17] Although drag queen performers are assumed to be male-identifying by most of my sources (including Judith Butler), I acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of non-male drag queens.

most pain" (p. 218). That is, camp parodies taste, gender, nationalism, or anything established solemnly precisely because they are elements so significant for the camp*er* (or the one who reads the performance as camp): if the multicultural discourse of gay pride, neoliberal success and authentic vulnerability is being discharged throughout the performances I analyze, it is because they hold cultural significance[18].

For exploring the propositional potential of camp I will rely on what Sedgwick calls a reparative reading. Sedgwick (2003) draws on psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's notion of schizoid-paranoid and depressive position [19] to propose "reparative reading" as an alternative epistemological stance from the paranoid one from which to practice critique. According to her, Klein's depressive position allows in the subject an opening to the new, to difference, unbounded by anxiety, while in paranoia there is a tendency to self-replication since the threatening/oppressive other is tautologically constituted by a projection of the self's own (destructive) desires. Based on Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the theories of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as situated within a "hermeneutics of suspicion", Sedgwick describes these forms of critique as paranoid readings: they are built upon a common mode of explaining social reality as the effect of a wide-range underlying system, like in paranoia, where an imminent threat is ubiquitous and undisclosed. This position of critique relies on the distinction between "hidden-shown, simulated-manifested" (p. 125), being the role of theory to expose and denounce these mechanisms.

In turn, Klein's theory proposes that the integration of the part-objects proper of the depressive position opens up the possibility of love (not as romantic love but as the acceptance of the coexistence of good and bad, safe and dangerous, into one same object).[20] In this sense, Sedgwick proposes a mode of knowledge production that is not constricted to the inevitable but is committed to recognize the reality as more complex and unpredictable, deploying local knowings and contingent theories. Doing reparation then entails taking an intellectual and emotional risk into the unexpected and the aesthetic attempt to incorporate (a depressive) pleasure into theory by allowing excitement on and reveling in the object without, however, denying social hierarchies and inequalities. Reparative reading is also defined by Sedgwick (2003) as "additive and accretive" (p. 149) and by Heather Love (2010) as intransitively "enabling" (p. 236). For Love, Sedgwick's theory

[18] Conversely, I am only criticizing the discourse of multiculturalism because I truly believe in its defiance of segregation, assimilation, and integration: it is precisely because I am profoundly touched with advertisements that promote the celebration of diversity and the respectful coexistence of differences that I allow myself to propose a critique of this approach.

[19] In using the notion of "position" instead of "ordered stages, stable structures, or diagnostic personality types" (p.128), Klein's theory resists essentializing rigid notions of self/identity

[20] Besides holding a reparative potential, the depressive position may also lead to maniac defenses, defined by Julia Kristeva (2000) as a self-centered disposition that treats the object with "control, triumph, and scorn" (p. 78).

allows her to explore and experiment, though not something in particular or with a discernible purpose beyond.

Re-Presenting the Material

My thesis is aligned with Jack Halberstam's project of creating an undisciplined and low theory that seeks less to establish radically new paradigms and more to promote alternative and ephemeral spaces of resistance. For these reasons, low theory's archives is composed of "silly" objects that are part of popular culture, usually considered irrelevant or improper for serious academic consideration (even within queer critique). While Ongina's act is more amateur in both its execution and recording, Alaska's video clip is a big production which involved highly skilled crew members and financial investment and is widely popular among drag enthusiasts. Instead of exalting strong feminine figures with distinguished beauty and stage presence both Ongina and Alaska break with the genre's conventions by performing ambivalent, self-questioning, and conflicted personas.

In this thesis, I analyze a video recording[21] of Ongina's[22] live lip-sync performance of US pop singer Cristina Aguilera's "Beautiful"[23], against the backdrop of the official video clip for the song. The video clip depicts Aguilera alone in an abandoned dark room singing to the camera as she inspires herself and seven characters to stand up and be proud of themselves: they are feeling sad for perceiving themselves as not conforming to the beauty standards facing themselves disapprovingly in the mirror or being avoided in public because of their deviant appearance and/or sexuality. They are: a skinny boy, an anorexic girl, a black young woman, and a cross-dressing/trans* middle-age man in their bedrooms; as well as a punk male teenager being avoided in a public bus, a girl being physically bullied by her peers in a dark alley and then alone in the kitchen table, and a male gay couple kissing in a busy street while being stared at by the passersby. (Figures present in the appendix – the first set of eight depicts the characters hurt and ashamed and the second set them happy as they realize "they are beautiful").

[21] The performance took place on October 25th, 2010 at Showgirls, a weekly drag party at Micky's West Hollywood nightclub in California, US. An official and unedited recording, lasting 4:06 minutes and which Ongina has recently shared in her public Facebook profile, was uploaded on Youtube two weeks after the act, having received over 60,000 views as of May 2017. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAY7PICvuC8

[22] Ongina is a Filipino American drag queen who became famous as one of contestants of the first season of RuPaul's Drag Race (being eliminated in the fifth out of 10 episodes). She is known for being a bald queen and for playing with gender ambiguity in her performances by embodying a "lady boy" style (as she describes it herself).

[23] The song is a famous pop ballad which was released in 2002 and became an anthem of affirmation and overcoming of hardships especially for the LGBT community.

In the first verse, Aguilera introduces the situation that brought her into such state of shame and explains herself, as if asking for the understanding of the spectator. On the chorus, she responds to that suffering by affirming herself as worthwhile: she establishes a binary by countering "shame", "pain", "insecurity" and "hard to breathe" (gasping) with "beauty", "inviolability" ("words can't bring me down") and "up" ("don't you bring me down").

If Aguilera's video clip is about stripped subjects who cover themselves with the safety belt of pride and autonomy ("No matter what they say / words won't bring us down"); Ongina's performance points us elsewhere - to a reformulation of our ethical bonds in the very moment of dissolution of law and society, the scene of hateful violence. For that, Ongina does not promote separatism but appeals to reacting to violence by changing already existing communitarian bondings from within.

Ongina plays with verbal irony in her act: while singing "I am beautiful, no matter what they say" she taints her body in red lipstick, noticeably being affected and disturbed by the hateful words she refers to, in contrast with the lyrics. Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4[24] (which were taken from the beginning and the end of the act) illustrate the transformation happening onstage: the audience follows the transition of a proud and respectable diva into a vulnerable subject who remains in the ground consumed by shame for having become ugly. I understand Ongina is not funny in her disidentificatory performance, but tragic and melodramatic: as the act ends, with Ongina lying in the ground covered in red lipstick, the MC shouts: "alright, giving you the drama, she is: Miss Ongina!".

Figure 2

Figure 1

[24] All the images used in this thesis are screenshots produced by me from the original video footage. Differences in aspect ratios are due to difference in the original material.

Figure 4

Figure 3

Amelia Jones (1997) argues that watching performances "live" should be considered as mediated as experiencing recordings of them (through audios, photographs, videos etc.) once the very presentness of performance does not allow the audience to get any closer to the "real" of the piece, its author's intentions or truth. Because I consider both attending the performance and analyzing its video recording have their own specificities, potentials and shortcomings, I would not posit my absence in the moment of performance as a limitation as the video recording provides me with a variety of potentialities not accessible to those present to watch it live. I consider, in line with Philip Auslander (1997), that there is no ontological difference between the live and the recorded performances insofar as both come into being as they disappear, that is, their presence is ever-vanishing and take shape only as "a subjective effect" (p. 54) since a video is only experienced through the rapid succession of stills and the performance through the sequence of instants. Acknowledging that Ongina and Alaska's performances were produced differently, and thus serve different generic expectations, I analyze them without any qualitative distinction.

The video clip[25] for the song "Your Makeup Is Terrible"[26] by US drag queen Alaska Thunderfuck[27] presents a prideful alien drag queen who depreciates our planet's inhabitants' make-up. Alaska is first seen addressing the spectator directly and introducing herself as this perfect being with an out-of-this-world beauty (Figure 5); then, she appears coming out of her limousine into a party - surrounded by monster-looking fans - and getting angry at the doorman for not recognizing

[25] The video lasts 5:09 minutes and was uploaded on Jun 9, 2014 on Youtube, having had over 4 million views as of May 2017. Directed by Saša Numić. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqGJ7I75aTE

[26] The idea for "Your Makeup is Terrible" first appears in RuPaul's Drag Race main challenge Alaska's commercial for her fragrance on episode eight of the season she participated in (the 5th).

[27] Alaska Thunderfuck participated on the fifth season of RuPaul's Drag Race (going up to the finals) and was the winner of the All Stars 2, a special season composed of only previous participants of the show. She describes herself on her official website as a "well-traveled, campy extraterrestrial" who is "as dangerous as a black hole". See: http://alaskathunderfuck.com/bio/

such a famous face like hers (Figure 6); after, Alaska is represented shirtless with a bleeding eye, no makeup on (but still wearing long nails) and the words of the title written in black on her face and neck, while striking poses to the camera (Figure 7); later, during the song's bridge, she appears on her dark dressing room taking several pills and shaving her hair in despair as she realizes her makeup is terrible (Figure 8); If on a first moment the performance glamorizes bitchiness, female competition, and commiseration, by the end of the video we are presented with Alaska topless and virtually out of drag, being approached by another drag queen, Mathu Andersen, who whispers on her ear that *her* makeup is terrible, after what both are covered in colorful powder (Figure 9). Makeup comes to mean a metaphor, that which stand in for the entirety of the subject, a defining part of the queen's identity, which is by extension deemed "failed".[28]

Figure 5

Figure 6

[28] Among several positive reviews online, one of them summarizes my analysis of the video: "That was nothing I expected but everything I wanted. I lived, I died and I was brought back to life all in 5 mins." Comment posted by "xrudiim" in 2015. Accessible on: https://www.reddit.com/r/rupaulsdragrace/comments/27rcoj/finally_alaska_thunderfuck_your_makeup_is_terrible/

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter deals with the concept of failure: I first discuss how biopolitical regimes grant and legitimate privilege through the toleration of mistakes, flaws and imperfections, while rendering ugly and immoral traits hyper visible for the oppressed, who are blamed for their own exclusion. Then, I present the aesthetic ethics of multicultural discourse of "everyone is beautiful" that informs Aguilera's performance, which is disidentified with by Ongina throughout her performance, suggesting a reconsideration of the meritocracy of the ethics of neoliberalism. After, I highlight how disidentifying with ugliness enables one to endure failure's serious consequences by making fun of them. Finally, proposing a reparative reading of disidentification, I outline the possibility of constituting ethical attachments based on failure - and not *despite* of them, which queer the very notion of community in providing unpredictable and ephemeral bondings.

The second chapter operates with the concept of vulnerability as first theorized by Emmanuel Levinas and then discussed by Margrit Shildrick and Judith Butler. Focusing more on

Alaska's performance, I consider the way she camps about the deployment of vulnerability as authenticity in RuPaul's Drag Race. Moreover, drawing on Megan Boler I discuss the shortcomings of identificatory empathy and delineate an alternative ethics based on witnessing and testimony, a kind of unreciprocous care that entails the acknowledgement of difference (as ungraspability) and transformation when encountering the "face".

Finally, the third chapter draws on Silvan Tomkins' delineation of the affect of shame as discussed by Eve Sedgwick and later on the book *Gay Shame* (2003) by several authors[29]. I argue that if the rhetoric of multiculturalism positions pride and shame in a binary relation of visibility and invisibility, reconsidering shame in its performative nature allow for a deconstruction of that binary. By the end, I propose a depressive love that embraces shame's challenging and transformative effects on identity as well as the unsustainability and provisionality of these attachments.

[29] *Gay Shame* is a book that resulted from an international conference that took place on 2003 at the University of Michigan.

Chapter One - Failure, Ugliness, and Meritocracy

Ellis Hanson (2009), wondering about the importance of a queer pedagogy, interrogates (with a hint of irony): "in the veil-ripping rhetoric of queer hermeneutics, what does it *expose*, what does it *interrogate*, what mystifications are shown *in all their nakedness*?" (p. 132). This being said, failure ought not to be conceptualized only in its negating potential: failure can also be propositional. I aim to extrapolate a reading of the performance of failure that asserts its disruptive potential to be restricted to exposing and revealing the mechanisms of oppression. For that, I am taking into consideration Sara Jane Bailes' (2011) suggestion that failure "teaches us about coping, accommodation, and repair, and the continuation of the event beyond and as a result of misfire" (p. 5). As an actor/actress forgets their line or a prop does not work as it is expected to a creative action must be figured out to substitute or remediate whatever outcomes failure produced: if failure is inevitable and refuses to vanish; or, in these cases, if ugliness is inescapable and insists on emerging, how to negotiate it?

The concept of failure I operate in this chapter refers to the unpredictable and instances of distance from ideals, expectations, and/or norms. Considered both paranoidly and reparatively, ugliness as failure holds the potential of being at once disruptive of any standards against which it is defined by rendering visible its assumed moral/aesthetic criteria; and productive of alternative relationalities unbounded by normative aspirations. Ugliness, in turn, is considered as a failure, in line with Peter Carmichael (1972) who also conceptualizes ugliness as "deficiency", or "failure to reach out or reach far in aesthetic realizations or visions; failure to engage aesthetic interests more than trivially" (p. 497).

In this chapter, I explore the queer effects of embodying ugliness, both in its corrosion of the hegemonic liberal success narrative and in its proposition of an ethics beyond admiration and through failure. First, I explain how I understand biopolitical regimes grant and legitimate privilege through the toleration of mistakes, flaws, and imperfections while performatively producing deviances as failures through the process of abjection. Then, I discuss how the multicultural logics that inform Aguilera's video clip assimilates failure into success by granting it the positive status of diversity. In the following section I consider how disidentifying with the trope of the diva poses a social critique to the meritocracy of our ethical relations while providing a way of enduring the painful consequences of individual failure. Finally, based on a reparative reading of disidentification, I argue that Ongina and Alaska in their gesture of uglifying themselves and sustaining provisionally the precarious space of failure suggest an ethics that begins with the other's

failures *as failures* (that is, without rendering them into alternative successes or negates them), and queers the very notion of community through the establishment of ephemeral and unpredictable bondings.

Projecting Failure and Praising Diversity

Alaska's and Ongina's daring performances are intense and unexpected because they embody the failure that is so pervasively resisted, repressed, and disavowed by hegemonic neoliberal and multicultural discourses alike. I will discuss now first how privilege is conceded by way of tolerating failures; and then how multicultural counter-discourse evacuates failure's critical edge by transforming it into alternative successes through the establishment of diversity as a (more inclusive) alternative set of aesthetic criteria.

Failure is not the sole property of the marginal subject - there is failure within the "normal" as well. I argue here that being entitled to failing and having your failures dismissed (as mere accidents, incidents, exceptions or gaps) is the mark of privilege - hegemonic masculinity for instance is "achieved" not by lacking flaws and weaknesses but by having one's privileges safeguarded by the dismissal of eventual failures as mere details.

Kaja Silverman affirms that ideals are never totally failed and never totally achieved, but one achieves privilege when one is "good enough".[30] Once we define norms as constitutively unattainable, privilege is (re)defined as the degree to which one can fail without being disapproved and still enjoy its benefits. In turn, the process of abjection/marginalization amplifies and confers hyper-visibility to failures, which come to contaminate the whole of the subject by equating the abjected's identity with the failures they supposedly perform. Lucius Garvin (1948) poses the "moral evil" as one anesthetic mode of considering ugliness - vilified for its moral repulsiveness, the object is deemed ugly not because of its unpleasant formlessness or lack of refinement but for its reprehensible corruption. In the same line, Carmichael (1972) affirm that the repugnancy elicited by the immoral and the ugly into the dominant subject, although distinct, overlap in some ways. This way, the ugly and the immoral come together in the figure of the abject, whose disgusting appearance, telling of their essence, must be repelled and eradicated.

Alaska, the alien, instantiates a hierarchy, where one (the beautiful) is in the position to judge the other (the spectator) and to decide whether or not the other's ugliness constitutes a problem. In the chorus, "Your makeup is terrible/ But I love you anyway", the beautiful is the one

[30] Cited by Jules Sturm (2012) on page 17.

"with"[31] voice and power of determination: entitled not only to delineate what is failure and what is not (the detainer of epistemological designation), but also to decide how to manage it. And she is so kind she decides to forgive us and tolerate our failures!

In so doing, Alaska is referencing to the drag art of *reading*[32] - when "the library is open", insults can be exchanged between drag queens[33] with the intention of being humorous, without "hard feelings", and usually foregrounding the other's failures in achieving *realness* (or to be "serving fish" or "being fishy"), which is the accurate approximation to the feminine image. But to enact *reading* in a video clip while talking to the camera is an impossibility: since the interlocutor cannot answer back, the *reading* ritual does not meet the required condition of reciprocity, so the insult stops being a joke and turns into a way of diminishing the other or holding a patronizing stance, as it is the case here.

As she arrives on a party surrounded by fans and is asked to identify herself, Alaska shouts: "Mr Doorman, what's that? You need my ID? This face is my ID, motherfucker!". Her gesture signals that a different set of rules applies to her, metaphorically affirming that celebrities, for their successful works and life, are creatures from another planet and thus should be granted differential treatment. The *unreadable* queen impersonated by her reinforces the notion of impenetrable (masculine) subject. Any attempt to bring into attention any possible inconsistencies in Alaska's appearance is rapidly dismissed. Alaska also presents herself as a demanding queen: while arriving at the club, supposedly the best in town, she sings that she expects it to be as good as its reputation. Unimpressed with the earthlings' make-up, Alaska starts chewing a plant in boredom: "but I love you anyway", she affirms patronizingly. As if she was whispering to us, wanting to avoid others from hearing the shameful truth she brings with her, Alaska the alien gives "us", the inhabitants of this planet, an advice in a condescending tone that is suggestive of a certain female camaraderie. Additionally, throughout the song she sustains the illusion that what is happening is a conversation by asking "Is that okay with you, honey?", or when presenting herself: "My name is Alaska (…), what's yours?". Considering this, the rhetorical question "Are you ready?" is another patronizing gesture that supposedly is giving the spectator some time to prepare psychologically for assimilating the discomforting message this outsider brings with herself.

Inhabiting the unintelligibility of abjection, "outsiders" pose a threat to the stability of boundaries, a reminder of what is constantly foreclosed in the process of establishing identity,

[31] I add inverted commas here to show my disagreement with a notion of voice and power as "belonging" to subjects or institutions.

[32] *Throwing shade*, in turn, is when the criticism is veiled and intended to be harmful in a subtle way.

[33] The fact that *reading* must occur only between drag queens is crucial since the gesture of a drag queen *reading* a "real" woman comes to reestablish a male mastery over femininity as I elaborated on the Introduction.

giving way to an anxiety of contamination. Foucault (2003) argues that modern states saw a transformation from a sovereign model of power, which exerted its authority through the enforcement of law and public executions, to what he calls "bio-power", with population control, operationalized through the constitution of state total institutions (namely, the prison and the asylum, which Foucault analyzes in depth) and disciplinary techniques. Negligent to unwanted populations who are left to die and/or kept outside the borders, bio-power promotes technologies of life (such as reproductive rights) that are targeted to maximize the efficiency and durability of the privileged, whose very privilege is granted through such process. Foucault argues this process lead to a disciplinarization of life in which the coercive effect of law gives way to the establishment of norms by way of the capilarization of power and individual self-regulation - which also provides the possibility of micro forms of resistance. In order for resistance to be possible, though, norms ought to become visible: norms grant the status of incontestable and pervasive by way of being legitimated by a dual process of normalization (as the most common feature in a population) and naturalization (as the rightful unmediated feature for an individual). Immanent to the biopolitical process of discriminating between lives that are worth investing on and lives that are neglected there is a constant restlessness about what might be uncovered in the contact with the Other - and for this reason, the Other is imprisoned, doped, silenced etc. As such, they need to be defined, contained and easily identifiable: Sedgwick (1990) discusses how the concept of 'gay people' is of most importance to those who define themselves against it and thus reducing straight anxiety by delineating those who feel homodesire and those who do not (p. 83).

Privilege thus is legitimized by the lack of failures that are actually the result of the very process of considering some failures as defining of identity and others as incidental, that is, of producing some deviations from hegemonic standards as intrinsic failures that signal how unfit and the entire subject is, and others as merely mistakes that carry with them an opportunity of learning and personal growth. As outlined in the introduction, systems of oppression are social arrangements that blame the abjected individual's behavior for their own systematic exclusion and discrimination as a class (for instance, the promiscuous woman, the lazy immigrant, the effeminate homosexual etc.). In other words, the process of abjection through neoliberal individualization performatively constitutes some deviances to the norm as failures, which are *projected* into the repudiated element while asserting the opposite (that the Other is othered because of their intrinsic traits). Through this process of culpabilization, the accusation of ugliness conveys a condemnation of carelessness which expresses a lack in moral integrity and, by extension, ethical worth. Such meritocratic logic poses privilege and abjection as the deserved outcome of individual behavior, resulting from the subject's actions or lack thereof.

One favored strategy for resisting this process is to take the blame away from the individual by showing the systemic oppression they are submitted to - it is the consolating move of saying "it is not your fault", with all its risks and benefits. A challenge for this approach is to find a way of maintaining a sense of collective responsibilization, that is, to address failure without dismissing it as simply pertaining to and resulted by "the system". Instead of covering their failures and hiding themselves (which is not indeed a good alternative) Aguilera encourages her addressees and the spectator to simply change their perspectives, to smile and realize it is the other who cannot see that their failure is actually a success (check the second set of figures in the appendix). The logic goes as follows: since it is the oppressor who is guilty of not seeing the oppressed virtues and beauty, the latter does not need to change anything but the way they "see themselves".

The characters in Aguilera's video clip first cannot fulfill the normative expectations of beauty. Aguilera suggests that although they are not beautiful like society expects them to be, they are beautiful nevertheless - it is society which is blind to their allure, "delirious" and "consumed in all [their] doom". Instead of feeling ashamed and guilty for having failed to achieve the ideals of our culture, Aguilera assures her community of outcasts that they did nothing wrong and should not try to mold themselves to fit into what the majority considers appropriate. As I understand it, this (liberal) multicultural[34] discourse of *"*everyone is beautiful*"* she enacts transforms the so-called defects, flaws and failures into advantages, strengths and successes worth being proud of[35].

This strategy is not blind to failures but address them so as to change their meaning and value. Aguilera actually recognizes the failure in the subjects she addresses in her video clip but disavows those same mistakes by adjectivating them with the term "beautiful" ("Full of beautiful mistakes"). This ideological assertion assumes an equation between beauty and "goodness", between being 'beautiful' and being worthy of ethical consideration. We may say she proposes an aesthetic ethics according to which subject should be worth of ethical consideration only once reformed and redeemed into the realm of the beautiful.

The pursuit of beauty, depicted variously in the video as looking like the model in the magazine cover, earning the admiration of others or avoiding inadequateness, is resignified by Aguilera as useless once beauty comes to mean a desexualized inner virtue that is not an achievement but instead innate. The value of beauty is aligned with the notion of difference. Sara Ahmed (2004) proposes that the multicultural tolerance of difference is conditional on a partial

[34] As I have mentioned in the Introduction, I use multiculturalism in this thesis as an ideological claim for the tolerance among and coexistence of discrete groups, defined by their stable identities, which should maintain their distinction from each other.

[35] I will approach gay pride rhetorics in more detail on chapter 3.

assimilation to the values of the nation; moreover, multicultural love requests that the tolerated other maintain and perform their difference so that the one may narcissistically assert how diverse and accepting one is (p. 138).[36] If "everyone is beautiful", then we do not need to engage with the other's difference nor to face that which may disturb or reflect our own inaptness - in saying "everyone is beautiful" Ongina's performance, in turn, opts for acknowledging her dependence on the other's recognition and renegotiate the terms of our bonds from within.

My critique to a multiculturalist approach is that it does not provide space for self-experimentation— the possibility of fluid subjectivities that change over time is foreclosed because difference is encapsulated within the term "diversity" into distinct and discrete identitarian groups. This is why the multiculturalist logic should not be our final goal but only a step: although it may provide crucial sustenance to subjects in precarious situations, its rhetorics is not radical nor transformative, but conservative. And there is nothing inherently bad or politically counterproductive with conservation (after all, people need to get through hard times somehow), but the toleration of differences, when understood as discrete and stable, cannot be our only and final agenda. If Aguilera's video clip indeed does not ask for people to blend in and normalize their failures by conforming to the norms, it does not approach the singularity of their differences either, as they are all equated as "beautiful". In so doing, each vector of difference (blackness, queerness, disabledness), as well as each context-laden occurrence of it, misses their specific critical potential, being their contribution reduced to a generic affirmation that norms are too narrow and that are subjectivities not represented on these ideals.

Paranoid Failure and Meritocracy

A paranoid reading of failure's critical potential holds on to the belief that if enough (pre-existent) failures are exposed the supremacy of the norms (according to which failure is designated) will be questioned: if so many people are refused privilege, we can question (once again) for whom does the norm actually *works?* Whom does the measurement of normality actually considers?

Therefore, failure is a useful concept to approach the excess that might destabilize the norms by revealing their existence as arbitrary norms, their inner workings and ineffectiveness. That is, the negativity of failure is conceptualized here as a prolific absence that brings about the uncovering of norms and, potentially, their upheaval. According to Eve Katsouraki (2013), failure holds a negative poiesis, defined by the author as "a creative affirmative of negation", which is

[36] Moreover, as I develop on chapter 2, multiculturalism forecloses encounters with Otherness in favor of associative and incidental encounters among similars.

violent because destructive, confrontational, with "aims to shatter conventional standards of hegemonic value" (p. 50). Another way of approaching the expositive function of failure is to think of it as diagnostic: among the inventory of failure made by Margaret Werry and Róisín O'Gorman (2012) are its symptomatic and diagnostic effects. Failure, according to the authors, provides a cartography of the norms as well as indicates what must be changed (p. 106). In some situations, the simple fact of making one's failures visible is enough to call attention to the harshness and rigidity of normative standards of excellence that praise accomplishment and punishes underachievement.[37] As discussed above, to be "within" the norm is not the absence of failure even for the most normalized and conforming of subjects. Therefore, giving visibility to failures may not question the legitimacy of hegemonic forms of oppression but instead serve to assimilate failures into a privilege that is more inclusive.[38]

Failure's critical potential is increased when camped about for camp enables social critique to be more widely considered by turning them into a humor that is not reprehensive: Halperin (2012) affirms that "camp is not criticism, but critique. It does not aim to correct and improve, but to question, to undermine, and to destabilize. (…) Camp doesn't preach [like satire]; it demeans. But it doesn't demean some people at other people's expense. It takes everyone down with it together" (p. 190 - 191). Likewise, Muñoz (1999) is attentive to the potential camp holds to comment on its object of parody when he affirms that disidentification offers a system of "semivolitional gestures whose ethos, while always survivalist, is also *critical*" (p. 168). In this passage, the author also signals out the importance of camp for securing the performer's integrity by taking away the seriousness and gravity of painful failures. First, I analyze how Ongina and Alaska expose the meritocratic bases of our community bonds by inhabiting the space of ugliness after gaining their audience's admiration. Then, I move on to a discussion of the survivalist aspect of camp, arguing that disidentifying with ugliness allows it to be endured by being made fun of and theatricalized.

In *Your Makeup is Terrible*, Alaska looks flawlessly beautiful in front of the cameras (Figure 10) while appearing unbalanced (taking a mouthful of pills) and insecure with her appearance (staring anxiously at the mirror) while backstage (Figure 11). The ugliness cast upon herself is the ugliness she rejects and denounces in the spectator, an ugliness that also causes her shame and pain as shown in the grotesque act of coughing blood (Figure 12). Then, she shaves her hair while crying,

[37] For instance, Melanie I. Stefan wrote a call for academics to publish their own "CV of failures" so as to highlight how academia follows a strict meritocratic logic that invisibilizes the multiple failures that constitute scholarly carrier (unfunded projects, unpublished papers, rejected applications etc.).

[38] For instance, when hegemonic masculinity incorporates sensibility and care but maintains its rationale of subjugation of the feminine.

inhabiting this the failure in meeting the beauty standards she herself imposed on others. As Alaska realizes her makeup is terrible after being told by Mathu she starts to shave, meanwhile asking: "do you love me anyway?". As she is reprehended for her bad makeup, her counter-intuitive response is to give up on pursuing conventional beauty by shaving her hair: her makeup is terrible, and now she does not have a wig anymore, providing another reason for being reprehended. In so doing, she provokes the limits of our admiration for her and exposes how conditional of meeting standards (of beauty, decency etc.) is the kind of attachment modeled by idol-fan relations.

Figure 12

Figure 11

Figure 10

We can also think of Ongina's painting of herself in red lipstick as a counter-intuitive act of 'uglifying' herself (for the redness that should be contained in the lips and face spreads over where it "does not belong to" (Figure 13). Ongina plays with irony by making herself (more) ugly as the song plays "No matter what we do (…) we are beautiful". As the song plays "We're the song outside of tune", Ongina applies lipstick outside her lips: in daringly and defiantly (staring at the audience with her face visible and up) performing the transformation of beauty into ugliness

(Figure 14) she pushes Aguilera's claim to its limits, testing how many "beautiful mistakes" can be tolerated and praised. By marking her already racialized body (she is Filipino-American) with red lipstick Ongina insists on difference and refuses to assimilate: her ugliness is not resignified as an alternative kind of non-hegemonic beauty (as posited by the multicultural mantra of "everyone is beautiful" that informs Aguilera's video), but it preserves its status as failure. Her gesture contests the unconditional love proposed by Aguilera and asks the audience a provocative question - if she loses her composure and presentability, will they love her anyway? On what is their love and appreciation of her based upon? What if she fails to overcome the mundanity of hateful acts and low self-esteem into the transcendence of beauty, like Aguilera advised?

Figure 14

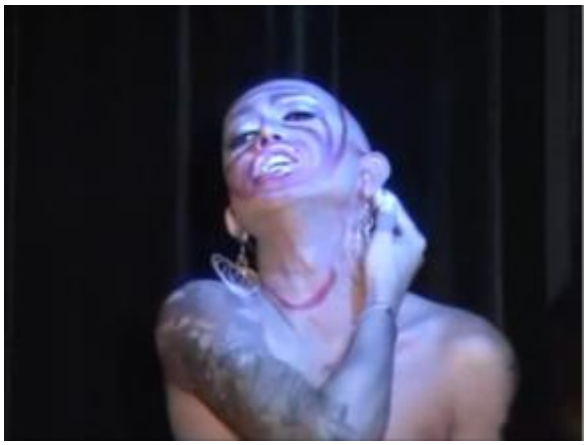

Figure 13

With their provocative and counter-intuitive gestures of uglifying themselves Ongina and Alaska expose how fragile (because dependent on the continuous individual achievement of moral standards) the basis of their ethical bonding with their fans and spectators are and invite us to think further: what if the drag queen, whom we expect to sheer us up with their "Charisma, Uniqueness, Nerve & Talent"[39], fails to meet those aspirations? As proposed by Werry & O'Gorman (2012), "if failure has a power of its own, it is the power of refusal, the power of exodus from power" (p. 107); I agree with Muñoz (2009) when he asserts that artistic failure may also be interpreted as "a refusal or an escape" to partake in hegemonic systems of valuation (p. 174). He continues affirming that such failure is "not aesthetic failure but political refusal", a refusal to play according to the rules that engender their own exploitation and oppression (p. 177). Likewise, Ongina and Alaska uglifying themselves can be interpreted as a refusal of subscribing to the meritocracy of neoliberalism (according to which each individual is given equal opportunities to achieve success)

[39] These are the main attributes requested of the participants of RuPaul's Drag Race.

that legitimizes the biopolitical division between people worth considering ethically and those worth disregarding and rejecting.

According to Esther Newton (1972), "camp humor is a system of laughing at one's incongruous position instead of crying. That is, the humor does not cover up, it transforms" (p. 109). For the author, campy drag queens make fun of themselves as a self-defense strategy against the explicit discrimination and solitude they face outside the stage[40]. Both Ongina and Alaska deploy disidentification to make the consequences of failing/being ugly more endurable: while Alaska uses camp humor to make fun of it by (when she sobs while shaving after singing "My makeup is terrible" in Figure 15), Ongina uses theatricalization to frame it as a "scene" and pretend it is being experienced by a character. Ongina's equally melodramatic disidentification is not as campy as Alaska's because less funny (as she breaks down in Figure 16 with her hands sustaining her face in despair, her mouth open turns the song's vocalizations into a wail). In any case, Ongina that takes away part of the gravity of painful situations since, as asserted by Halperin, "the representation of queer tragedy through melodrama, then, involves a passion that is not so much felt as performed".[41]

Figure 15

[40] For this reason, if camp fails to be humorous, the performance becomes filled with self-pity, which lead several critics to posit camp as a self-depreciating practice (indeed, this is the effect when humor is not achieved and the irony is misunderstood in its literality).

[41] Taken from a lecture, "Tragedy Into Melodrama: Towards a Poetics of Gay Male Culture" given on February 15, 2008, at the Center for 21st Century Studies / University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, US https://www4.uwm.edu/c21/archivepage/timeline/2000s/2007-08/halperin/halperin.shtml

Figure 16

It is important to notice that it is often more affordable for a man (in drag) to disidentify with beauty standards since the imposition of proper appearance affects women - and defines femininity - much more than it affects men. As argued by Anna Tóth (2010), a woman who does not attain the beauty standards is "invalidated" and confined to the role of mother or madonna/saint/nun, and/or infantilized - that is, it ceases to be attractive. Although Aguilera depicts an anorexic girl side by side with a boy that wishes he had more muscles, I understand the imperative of having muscles for men to differ both quantitatively and qualitatively from the imperative of being slim for women. However, I want to consider the importance of self-appearance for gay men, whom are much more likely to experience body image disorders than straight men[42]: if we take Alaska's camping about beauty only in its humorous aspect, it earns the status of an affective compensation to the usual importance given to beauty in gay subculture, or, as posited by Halperin (2012), "as gay male culture's way of trying to disintoxicate itself from its own erotic and aesthetic passion for masculine beauty" (p. 207). Ongina, in turn, risks being cast as crazy, insane, her performance looked away in disapproval, her act execrated for her absurd and excessive tragic behavior. What I delineate here is a possible way of considering her ethically without earning aesthetic pleasure or finding her attractive.

Disidentification, Reparation, and Queer Communities

As I have mentioned, Ongina impersonates the trope of the beautiful and loved diva in the first half of her performance to question its legitimacy and expose its status as an unreachable and

[42] The gay man's obsession with his body health, which led to the solidification of gay gym culture, emerged as a counterbalance to the stereotype of the ill homosexual intensified during the AIDS crisis of the 1980's in the US.

toxic ideal. In the act's turning point Ongina poses her critique without mocking Aguilera nor repudiates her effusively as a paranoid reading of camp would expect: instead of taking away the importance of beauty and the aesthetic altogether or affirming there are other features on the self that can *compensate* for that lack; instead of the transcendence of ugliness into beauty by way of considering it "diversity"; Ongina and Alaska propose a disentanglement between ethics and aesthetics that considers the ugly as equally worth of ethical consideration. Reading camp - and disidentification more generally - reparatively (that is, not only as a distancing satire but also as an attaching whim), I argue that Ongina and Alaska retain the value and importance of being praised, being considered ethically, being appreciated, but refuses to achieve this recognition through success, through beauty - as Ongina draws outside the margins (of her lips), the irregular and asymmetrical body that emerges instigates the audience to reconnect with her and suggest a reclamation of our failures as potentially suggestive of a relationality that goes beyond the traits worth incorporating, beyond admiration and role-modeling.

In parodying divahood Ongina and Alaska suggest a reconsideration of both the bases of our appreciation of the world (aesthetics) beyond the successful/beautiful and the bases of our responsibility towards the other (ethics) - be they beautiful, ugly, or simply not memorable. Their gesture of insisting on performing their ugly presence on stage echoes that of The Color Purple[43]'s protagonist, Celie, who sings to her abusive husband "I may be poor, I may be black, I may be ugly, but I am here". Her presence, as a poor black lesbian, must be contended with no matter how strongly oppressive regimes of knowledge-power insist on invizibilizing, muting, and killing them.[44] Ongina's gesture can be interpreted as either "I am a failure" or "I have failed"; in any case she is there, alive, and all too present. In positioning ugliness as failure (and avoiding being proud of it), one says: it might be my *fault*, it might be that I am indeed responsible for this failure, but I am here and my presence needs to be considered ethically. While in the previous section of the chapter I adopted a paranoid reading of the performances to argue that Ongina and Alaska expose the meritocracy of identity-based love by performing their ugliness as a failure, in this section I consider the positive effects of inhabiting failure and reclaim ugliness to think an elsewhere, or an "elsehow" based on the campy appreciation of the awful.

Sedgwick moves one step further than Butler and Halperin - who read camp from a paranoid position - and asserts that there is more to camp than (self-)contempt and repudiation. I

[43] The Color Purple is a 1982 novel by Alice Walker (adapted into a film (1985) and musical (2005)) which tells the story of self-love and acceptance of a poor black lesbian in the 1910's countryside of the US.

[44] If by the end Celie sings "I am beautiful and I am here" as well as "I don't need you to love me", becoming closer to Aguilera's neoliberal discursive logics, what I explore in the remainder of this chapter is that first moment when Celie assumes the failure that is cast upon her and imposes herself in affirming "I am here".

agree, indeed, that camp's political importance derives from more than the corrosion of homophobic discourses from within, more than pure mockery of seriousness and high art. Thus, besides figuring disidentification and failure's critical potential in regimes of truth-visibility (for instance, by considering art to be relevant for us to *visualize* the hidden, represent the invisible, express the repressed, bring lucidity to the confusing etc.), I consider reparatively what worlds are engendered for the duration of the performances (and their aftermath).

Sedgwick (2003) suggests a reparative reading of camp would be attentive to

> the passionate, often hilarious antiquarianism, the prodigal production of alternative historiographies; the "over"-attachment to the fragmentary, marginal, waste or leftover products; the rich, highly interruptive affective variety; the irrepressible fascination with ventriloquist experimentation; the disorienting juxtapositions of present with past, and popular with high culture (p.150).

Thus, camping entails interest and excitement for peculiar things as well as caring and loving gestures. For Susan Sontag (1964), camp is "a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation - not judgment" (p. 62). She follows, affirming that camp advances a fascination with the awful, "low", disregarded, and discarded, and delights in "certain passionate failures" (p. 62) by supplanting the content of "truth, beauty, and seriousness" with the style of melodramatic sentimentality, awfulness, and playfulness.

I argue that a reparative reading of disidentification (which integrates its critical, expositive, and distancing consequences with its generative, propositional, and attaching status) acknowledges disidentification's potential for providing an appreciation of failure - an appreciation which can be called reparative insofar as it allows the integration of failure and worth into one single subject who can be at once aesthetically disapproved (i.e. regarded as ugly) and ethically considered (i.e. taken care of). In other words, a reparative understanding of camp - and disidentification more broadly - allows the creation of relationalities which acknowledge failures: through a reparative disidentification, Ongina and Alaska's ugliness may be appreciated nonjudgmentally for their awfulness. We may affirm then that disidentification may only be performed from a depressive position (in which the subject can conceive an object full of flaws, imperfections, and under-achievements, and afford to love them) since if performed from a paranoid position disidentification becomes instead counter-identification (as an oppositional mockery that only denounces but does not hold any enjoyment or fascination for its object).

It is worth mentioning that the appreciation of failure engendered by depressive disidentification is not only a matter of interpreting things differently, but it also has a performative effect of conferring intelligibility. According to Muñoz (1999), "[c]amp is, then, more than a

worldview (…) Camp is a practice of suturing different lives, of reanimating, through repetition with a difference, a lost country or moment that is relished and loved. Although not innately politically valenced, it is a strategy that can do positive identity- and community-affirming work" (p. 128). This way, performing disidentification not only changes our perception of failure and provides alternative epistemologies with which to conceive our subjectivity, but it also involves the ontological exercise of what Muñoz (1999) calls "world-making": "more than simply views or perspectives; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of "truth" that subjugate minoritarian people" (p. 195). Disidentificatory performances hold the potential of enlarging horizons of possibility and making available non-conventional modes of being in the world. For this reason, performance is such a favored *praxis* with which to consider the positive, creational aspects of failure: performance does not seek only to make the audience *see things differently* and change their perceptions but, in staging unforeseeable elements and plots, performance also enlarges the realm of the possible zone of inhabitability. In other words, by virtue of the denouncing of norms, the visibilization of alternative subjectivities occurs, enabling in the process their proliferation. Thus, inhabiting ugliness at the same time enables social critique (when considered anti-establishment) and prompts the imagining of alternatives: that is, once norms are made visible and partially disrupted minoritarian subjectivities can start to be conceived.

One of the challenges of conceptualizing failure is: how to advocate for the transformative potential of this concept without wishing to promote it? How to maintain the flawed, messy and frustrated status of failure and not turning it into a new kind of success? Does the generation of queer communities through failure alters failure's status, turning it into a reformed instance of success once the 'goal' becomes to create an alternative ethics to the hegemonic? Here is where the anti-normativity of queerness ought to be (re-)considered. Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson (2015) criticize queer theory for perpetuating the politics of oppositionality characteristic of liberationist counter-discourses. In focusing so much on criticizing and countering norms, a binary is established in which rigidity, stability, accordance, immobility and restrictiveness is (performatively) projected into the concept of "norms" while "queerness" (and queer thinking) is positioned as fluid, ambivalent, transgressive, mobile and decentered. Such critique misses however another meaning of anti-normativity: besides being "against" and "counter" the hegemonic norms, queerness avoids erecting itself as the new norm as it perpetuates, in a post-modern move, "non"normativity through fluidity, displacement and the possibility of constant transition.

Werry and O'Gorman (2012) affirm that "[i]ntentional failure is tactical, never strategic" (p. 107). In this line, the communitarian ethics I will outline now can be considered queer because anti-normative: it does not aspire to become the norm or to last for long but is content with just

being and providing a space of belonging while it lasts. Communities based on failure are not in any way a substitute for every kind of community as it would be impossible to sustain society or life without stable communities. Moreover, failure cannot be predicted, and in its unexpected character stands the promise of improvisational reconfiguration of our values and identities. Like the experience of shame, which weights us down into our bare existence, to fail is to be shaken and have our certainties disturbed: the pain that results from cutting oneself while cooking distractedly brings one to the now, away from the thoughts that distracted one from one's chores and into the flesh which now aches, requests attention, and changes in the process. So failure is also a *caesura* in which lurks the opportunity for redirecting one's actions, reconsidering one's presence in space and even reassembling one's sense of self (while resisting to do so from an alleged position of power and intentional agency). It is the property of failure to withhold an imaginative pluralism, for failure comes in various unpredictable forms[45] - unlike success, which is often theorized as one-dimensional and easily definable.

Jack Halberstam (2011) conceives failure as a queer art that has the potential of imagining new socialites and suggesting alternative forms of resisting capitalism, memorializing violence and up-taking mastery. Halberstam's project, as I read it, is not about encouraging[46] forgetfulness, but about "enjoying" it when it happens, which is the queer enterprise to begin with: not *stimulating* queerness by proposing it as a standard but *exploring* its potentialities whenever it emerges. The author analyzes the animated movie *Finding Nemo*'s character Dory, who suffers from short-term memory loss and continuously forgets where she is going to and who are their friends. In discussing the queer effects of Dory's forgetfulness, Halberstam (2011) points out that "she actually signals a new version of selfhood, a queer version that depends upon disconnection from the family and contingent relations to friends and improvised relations to community." (p. 80) We may affirm then that the temporality of worlds engendered by failure is not concerned with establishing long-term commitments or provoking long-lasting effects. For Halberstam, forgetfulness can produce queer communities, ephemeral and with other temporalities than the heterosexual. In his words, "[t]he contingency of queer relations, their uncertainty, irregularity, and even perversity, disregards the so-called natural bonds between memory and futurity, and in the process, make an implicit argument for forgetfulness" (p. 74). In this sense, Dory has a lot to do with reparative reading since

[45] I recognize that to use the generalizing concept of failure to refer to a vast variety of phenomena, the heterogeneity of specific failures are amalgamated. To use this concept (and any concept in fact) is to point out the common stance of diverse failures in opposition to the prevailing endorsed values/virtues in each occasion.

[46] This is due also because, as suggested by Le Feuvre (2010), once failure is intentionally sought (as when failure is staged), it can only be read in terms of success/failure: therefore, to fail "correctly" would problematically constitute a success.

the latter renounces to anticipate the unknown and is willing to take intellectual risks, which opens up the possibility of surprise and unpredictability.

To perform reparation, we may affirm, entails not holding tight to our memories, but letting these operate through our embodiment - that is, if our experiences are not "storaged" in our memories, they nevertheless had affected and changed us in non-cognitive ways. Besides, according to Melanie Klein, it is only on a depressive position that absence can be experienced - with the introduction of the third party (and the development of the Oedipus complex) the absence of the Other may be processed. While a paranoid position interprets lack as the presence of a "bad" abandoning breast and takes failure as the sign of decadence and moral corruption; a depressive position acknowledges the lack of the other in its frustrating incompleteness and integrates it reparatively into a whole object made of pleasing and distressing aspects at once; Julia Kristeva (2000) suggests these experiences of frustration are foundational of sublimation and creativity. (p. 80)[47]

To find a connection through our failures is not an easy endeavor. What if we start caring for each other based not on similar traits (as in identity-based communities, which privilege sameness over difference) but on what makes us distinct, on the ways we differ and diverge? Beside (and by way of) exposing the demands and requirements of beauty and love, the two performances propose an alternative ethics, a kind of relationality that is based not on the achievements of the other, or common positive traits, but in negative terms.

A community of failure queers the notion of community since it would not be imagined as complete, whole, self-coherent and self-reproducing - and for that reason would not expect its members to be the same. As a result, in communities constituted in failure nobody would consider committing self-ostracism and nobody would need to be ostracized. Nobody would not be "good enough" because the thought that one is not good enough for belonging to a certain community vanishes when we start considering that the only thing that is constant is the bonds (our commitment to sustaining each other) and not the members nor the community itself. To respect and engage with the other's failures would be the only rule because the community's identity, like its members', would be fluid and ever-changing. Also, community in failure is perpetually renewing itself since there are infinite ways of failing. In order for us to acknowledge failure in all its complexity we must be attentive to details and reparatively allow ourselves to meet subversiveness alongside oppression.

[47] For instance, by providing coping mechanisms with which to deal with the other's absence; as well as giving the occasion to imagination (where can the other be if not with myself?).

In this chapter, I have introduced how failure is dismissed through a biopolitical process of granting privilege and abjection; as well as the normalization of differences by multiculturalist discourses. Then, I have shown how the reclamation of failure - as ugliness - through disidentification at once enables an ironic take on the otherwise serious notion of failure and poses a critique to the meritocracy of love by inquiring the limits of a neoliberal ethics based on meritocracy: Ongina and Alaska, in uglifying themselves, push the multicultural mantra of "everyone is beautiful" to its limits. Finally, I have highlighted the utopian potential of ugliness in imagining alternative ethical bondings not conditional on admiration, aesthetic appreciation or accomplishment. Finally, I explored how camp allows for a mode of attachment based on the awful that queers the very notion of community by providing unpredictable and ephemeral connections.

Chapter Two - Vulnerability, Authenticity, and Responsibility

Vulnerability is usually defined as a propensity to being moved, affected or altered in some way by an exterior force. The concept earns a negative valence when that which is being moved, affected or altered ought to be conserved, that is, when the staticism of form is valued more than the transformative outcomes of encounter. To put it in another way, vulnerability can only be thought once the notion of an inside (as a definable and integral ontology) is settled. On this topic, there is a debate on the aftermath of vulnerability: Frerks, Warner and Weijs (2011) question whether resilience should be conservative or transformational as they consider if actions towards the outside disturbance should aim to *recover* a previous state of being or if the changes that undergo in any traumatic event should be embraced.

Alaska shows in her video a way of embracing the change that results from an encounter that displays her vulnerability. At two-fifths of the video, Alaska is presented by another drag queen with the so feared Death card, which in tarot signifies ends and beginnings, holding the promise of purification and renewal and envisioning transformation (Figure 17). Indeed, Alaska experiences a significant change after the card is revealed: from an arrogant diva she turns into a stripped character that inhabits vulnerability.

Figure 17

According to Judith Butler (2012), vulnerability should not be conceptualized as a propensity or inclination of a particular being but as a (two-way) connection:

> Vulnerability is not a subjective *disposition*, but a *relation* to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge upon or affect us in some way. As a way of being related to what is not me and not fully masterable, vulnerability is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and

> responsiveness are not clearly separable from one another, and not distinguished as separate moments in a sequence. (p. 16, emphasis added)

I shall demonstrate in this chapter how Alaska embraces vulnerability by giving up on self-mastery, which engenders a process of facefication, that is, of exposing her self to the indeterminacy of the encounter with Mathu. Unlike (neo)liberal discourses that pose vulnerability as opposed to notions of autonomy, agency and action while emphasizing paternalistic protection as the "solution", the notion of vulnerability I put forward in this chapter intermingles with agency: in this chapter I argue that Ongina and especially Alaska reclaim vulnerability as a site of queer resistance to the liberal ideal of authenticity without positioning it as the utmost and irreducible reality of the subject, its most intimate truth. I argue that the new neoliberal model of subjectivity, which informs multicultural identity politics, claims the exposure of vulnerability as authenticity, in ways that reinforce a closure to Otherness (as that which shakes the foundation of the same). By camping about the relatability that is requested by the show's presenter, Alaska exposes the constructed and theatrical nature of exposing one's vulnerability and suggests the contingent nature of vulnerability, which, I argue, performatively comes into being in the very moment it is exposed.

Alaska's performance exposes the shortcomings of identificatory empathy and suggests a reconfigured notion of vulnerability that entails an openness to transformative encounters with otherness and uncertainty. Then, based on the reading of Emmanuel Levinas proposed by Margret Shildrick and Judith Butler, I imagine an ethics of risk that engages the reader/spectator in self-transformation on the occasion of the encounter with the Other. Drawing on Megan Boler's criticism of identificatory empathy for consuming Otherness into sameness, I ask: can we witness Alaska's vulnerability as a testimony, and, as such, ungraspable? Can we afford to risk our own identities in this encounter with the stranger and allow ourselves to be touched and affected?

Traditional Hegemonic Liberal Discourses and Vulnerability

From the correct way of using language to the moral way of exerting citizenship, throughout Western history a binary has been established, a binary that positions Nature/Masculine/Impenetrability/Autonomy on the one side (valued) and Artifice/Feminine/Vulnerability/Dependency on the other (unvalued). The rejection and projection of vulnerability is one component of heteropatriarchal systems of oppression, which praise sovereign distinguishable bodies and subjects. Luce Irigaray (1985) asserts that the logos is constitutively masculine because it assumes a subject who is armored against external influences and independent from financial obligations (i.e. in the case of logos as Scientific Knowledge) and

sincere, expressive, and coherent (i.e. in the case of logos as Language). This way, the author affirms that feminine notions such as fluidity, influentiability, and incoherence are foreclosed in the name of an autonomy that assumes self-sameness, constancy, and consistency. In this paradigm Otherness becomes the terrain of bias, deviance, and undesired turbulence, while identity is praised for signaling the perpetuation of tradition and individuality. Forming this paradigm is an anti-theatrical tradition of thought, spanning from Plato to Rousseau, which foregrounds self-sameness and authenticity over susceptibility and artificiality.

Such ideological divide informed the development of the liberal subject of individual rights around the European Enlightenment. In this discursive formation, the injurability of the human is resisted in favor of individual protection, a model that reinforces a white, masculine, middle-class model of subjectivity. In turn, vulnerability is projected onto the abjected, whose identity becomes defined by the very vulnerability that legitimates their exclusion. But this is never a definitive process: it works though reiterations of exclusions, and for that it is prone to failure in each of the repetitions (so that the projection of vulnerability, as a process that requires repetition, is also vulnerable to failing).

According to Shildrick (2002), who draws on Emmanuel Levinas to consider the critical potential of encounters with the monster/Other, "[t]he disruption of corporeal integrity and the open display of bodily vulnerability is always a moment for anxiety and very often for hostility" (p. 53). Vulnerability thus elicits a feeling of uneasiness that entraps the subject into a barren and repetitive inquietude about the imminence of an uncertain event. If, however, fluidity is embraced in a post-modern move, the obsession with conserving a solid and unchanging self might be reduced and an openness to the transformative potential of the encounter might be seized.

For Butler (2006), who also reads Levinas' work closely, the disclosure of vulnerability induces different affective reactions: to maintain an illusion of impenetrability subjects may resort to outwards violence (fueled by anger) or, alternatively, a desire to disappear (flooded by shame), both of which I will approach in the next chapter. Alternatively, she proposes that we accept and assume vulnerability without seeking to eliminate it completely and quickly. By embracing the *flaws* implicit in the act of performing sovereignty and identity, the anxiety of having one's self disturbed partly goes away, giving way to love and responsibility. This approach will be the focus of this chapter.

Butler, considering the political and community-forming status of collective mourning, sustains that the disavowal of mourning for victims of "distant" wars legitimates the permissibility of violent towards them. To counter our disengaged gaze towards these, Butler asserts that the acknowledgement our shared humane inter-dependency would provide the grounds for a political

community of mutual care that goes beyond sameness and familiarity but is built upon the recognition that because the other is also vulnerable we hold an ethical responsibility of care (p. 49). In other words, we are compelled to care for the other because the other has a "face", that is, a defenselessness that is pure (susceptible) *presence* and no (resistant) *action* (in the strict sense of the word). In yet another words, the "face" only expresses the existence of experiences, which it has no control over.

As pointedly posited by Shildrick, Levinas' main insight is to pose ethics as pre-political. That is, instead of autonomous subjects who decide when and how to enter moral contracts (which are political because susceptible to contestation), Levinas places an "unwilled primary exposure to the Other" as that which brings the subject into being and that can work, according to Butler (2005), "as the sign, the reminder, of *a common vulnerability, a common physicality and risk* (even as 'common' does not mean 'symmetrical' for Levinas)" (p. 100, emphasis mine). In this sense, reciprocity does not mean equal degrees of care from each part since the relation can be unbalanced (and unproblematically so): mutual, yes, but not necessarily horizontal. For Levinas, ethics is about putting the other's needs before oneself's, the true altruistic move: we are not to care so we can request to be cared in return. As affirmed by Cary Wolfe (2010) "the truly ethical act is one that is directed toward the moral patient from whom there is no expectation, and perhaps no hope, ever, or reciprocity" (p. 15).

Shildrick (2002) points out that Levinas is often criticized for being unclear whether he is being prescriptive or descriptive - is he telling us how the ethical encounter proceeds or is he sketching a favored way of managing it? (p. 90) Maybe both. The question then is how to conceive of ways of reacting to the encounter with the other's "face" without a murderous violence (which would annihilate Otherness and foreclose the possibility of society) nor its disavowal. The question though is how to interfere in the realm of ethics not through conscious intentional efforts nor through assuming it is a pre-linguistic outside of power.[48]

Butler suggests that it is not necessarily by representing the human face that we perceive the other as bearing a "face" - she cites the example of faces that are presented in the media as belonging to the "evil" and merciless inhumane enemy. Instead, the Levinasian "face" might emerge in the back, the shoulders, the parts that signal a sobbing, a suffering being who reacts and responds when 'touched'. Thus, in my understanding, what entitles one to have a "face" is not belonging to the human species nor being able to care, but *expressing suffering* (Atterton, 2011).

[48] Pre-ontological is different from pre-linguistic in that the encounter with the Other is always already mediated by discourse.

The first scene in which Alaska presents some rendition of vulnerability starts while she is singing repeatedly "Are you Ready?": showing her bony semi-naked body slowly (Figures 18, 19, and 20) produces a suspense over what will she show next, what lies on the other side of her face (shown only in profile (Figure 21)).[49] In sustaining a mystery about her countenance, Alaska intensifies the moment of disclosure of her injury. However, I understand that in showing her back, she already shows her "face": actually, Figure 21 and Figure 22 are not that different from each other because even before we can see Alaska's face, we can relate to her "face", that is, to her capacity to suffer and being affected - her movement also enhances her skinniness and bones, which are shown with the use of long-lasting closeups that show the details of her skin.

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

[49] Indeed, to appear facing backwards constitutes vulnerability in itself (as a creature who does not reattribute the gaze of the spectator, who is looked at but does not look back), a vulnerability that is produced by the way it is presented. Being onstage usually entails an over exposition of one's own body that forecloses the possibility of looking back at the audience since the spotlights usually blind the performer (which is a vulnerability not perceived by the audience but only felt by the performer.)

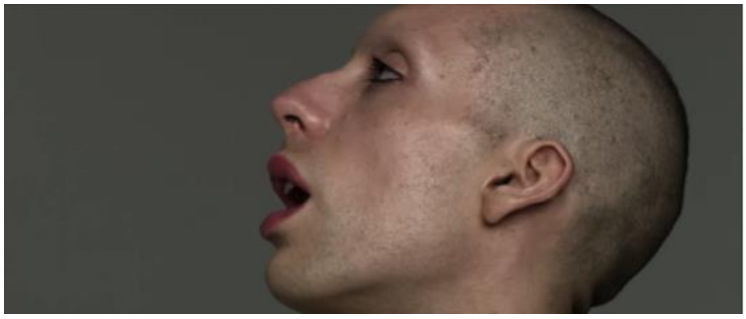

Figure 21

Alaska appears during the second chorus with the injurious words "Your Makeup is Terrible" written over her hurt face. In figure 3 we can see how Alaska presents her pain resulted from being target of the same injury she was casting to others. This suggests that the one who hurts is actually killing a part of oneself (if we consider that our bonds constitute our sense of self and sustain our bodily integrity), but the interpretation I want to focus in here is that she is showing how prone she is to being injured with the same weapon she uses to hurt others. In staging the suffering caused by her failure from achieving the standards of beauty, she exposes how harshly these ideals are imposed on others and how susceptible she is to being named. Likewise, one way of interpreting the blood-like red paint with which Ongina covers her body in her act is that it represents the pain of being considered unfit, ugly, inappropriate; it stands for the embodied marks of social exclusion, for how injury becomes marked in the skin - which is at once the visible surface of our beings and the most profound of our organs (Figure 23).

Figure 22

Figure 23

However, Alaska remains glamorous and seductive when posing like a pin-up model to the cameras, offering her body to the gaze of the spectator while apparently gazing at them (Figure 22). Alaska responds to such outbreak of vulnerability by aestheticizing it, transforming it into a source of profit, exhibiting it to the cameras by turning it into a concept, the black liquid eruption that may symbolize a lively ejaculation or an eruption of a toxic liquid (Figure 24); embodying the feminized gesture of self-touching (Figure 25), and even camping about this hyper-sexualization process with an exaggerated display of the excitement and arousal by opening widely her mouth and rolling her eyes (Figure 26). She transcends vulnerability by turning it into an aesthetic asset, a sublimated condition that composes her newly developed look.

Figure 24

Figure 25

Figure 26

I understand vulnerability to be disavowed in this scene through the process of fetishization, which resists facefication - although physically hurt, naked, Alaska remains on hold of herself (as she moves her head and arms and sings). In turn, on the last scenario (against a black backdrop) Alaska is shown helpless and passive (but still *present* and *reacting*, that is, *agentive* in a different degree[50]. Read this way, the Alaska that is shown contacting Mathu is the only rendition of Alaska that presents her "face", that is, her primary state of defenselessness; This is due to her being put "out of control" by a cursing, a saying ("Your makeup is terrible") that was *felicitous* (insofar as it achieved the expected effect of hurting).

In a more recent talk, Butler (2014) affirms that "it would not be a sufficient politics to embrace vulnerability or to get in touch with our feelings, or bare our faultlines as if that might launch a new mode of authenticity or inaugurate a new order of moral values or a sudden and widespread outbreak of "care"' (p. 14). Based on that, I assert that we should be cautious with aligning the "face" as that which lies underneath the "mask" of empowerment and autonomy, that is, we should be careful when trusting that *revealing,* in a paranoid move, the vulnerability rejected by traditional liberalism would be enough to make humans take responsibility for each other instead of denying the humanity of their enemies (by disavowing their deaths, for instance). After all, to expose one's experience of pain might evoke empathy if this brings us to identify with them, but what if they are not requesting empathy but that we let ourselves be transformed by the recognition that their suffering is ungraspable and that this does not exempt us from our responsibility? I shall consider this in the second part of the chapter in order to delineate alternative ways of mobilizing vulnerability beyond relatability. For now, I will discuss the object of Alaska's mockery in two of her five impersonations (the diva backstage and the vulnerable subject): RuPaul's demand for Alaska to show her vulnerability on stage.

[50] Alaska is reacting insofar as she moves her face slightly upwards and opens her eyes facing the camera as Mathu, the other queen, approaches (compare Figures 29 and 30); moreover, she contracts her eyes as the powder hits her (Figure 34).

Vulnerability as Authenticity in RuPaul's Drag Race

On the sixth episode of the fifth season of RuPaul's Drag Race, RuPaul critiques Alaska after her runway performance: "I get a sense that you *hide behind* sticky characters and there is a level of *vulnerability* that you're not allowing us *to see* (…) I wanna get to the *heart* of Alaska". Based on this affirmation, I will show how vulnerability is deployed by RuPaul as an "antidote" to both excessive humor and competitivity and an enabler of a connection between the performer's authentic identity and the audience's. Then, I will show how Alaska satirizes RuPaul's demand, denouncing how it reinforces the oppressive ideal of a liberal self while hinting at a reconsideration of authenticity.

Although the concept of vulnerability recurrently appears in the show - usually as a demand to the contestants - it is never defined. Fans debate the meaning of this term in online forums: some argue that vulnerability is related to crying in front of cameras or disclosing significant secrets; being caring (as opposed to overtly competitive); and feeling genuinely hurt, while lack of vulnerability is related to being "confident", "strategic" or "artificial"[51]. Another term used to describe RuPaul's deployment of vulnerability is *relatability*, which I will approach in the next section when discussing empathy.

My reading is that in opposing vulnerability to "hiding", its meaning is associated with truth; and in opposing vulnerability to "sticky characters", it earns the status of seriousness. RuPaul's demand for Alaska's vulnerability to be shown is founded on the show's valuing of the contestant's "charisma"[52], one of the main 'ingredients' needed for becoming "America's next drag superstar": what is being judged is not only the craftsmanship of each contestant (how well they dance, sing, entertain, tell jokes, sew, do their makeups etc.) but quite importantly their personalities: how kindly they react backstage, how fairly they treat their opponents, how professionally they react to the critiques… With this demand, RuPaul requests the competitors to be not only funny and fashionable, but also a generous and charismatic diva whom people can aspire to become, an *idol*, and an *entrepreneur*[53]. Which is to say: drag is not "only entertainment", not only about impersonating arrogant celebrities, but is also a (normalizing) space that provides

[51] Suggested in an unofficial fan's forum: https://www.reddit.com/r/rupaulsdragrace/comments/2tp2zq/whos_the_least_vulnerable_queen_whos_ever_been_on/ Accessed on February 12th, 2017

[52] Even though a fair deal of how a queen's personality is presented depends on post-production editing (since the episodes are not broadcasted live).

[53] In the sense that they are being assessed according to their skills in working under stress, of putting up their own projects (such as commercials, personal brands…) with restricted amount of time (after all, is a "race") and in working in groups.

hope and role models to young queers in their process of self-acceptance (which provides an activist undertone to the program). I shall come back to this in the next section.

RuPaul requests the exposure of vulnerability especially of those queens who are most *campy* - and rely on their humor, which supposedly distances the audience from the performer - or *competitive* - and suspicious of their peers, which also distances the audience because lacking in humbleness. I shall examine each of these in detail now.

RuPaul's deployment of vulnerability acquires normative status once it is "imposed" from a position of authority. In RuPaul's Drag Race, the "correct" mobilization of one's vulnerability is considered a feature that will bring the contestant closer to winning the prize (because it will please the juris) - in other words, vulnerability in the show is commodified and, thus, fetishized, spectacularized: it gains currency, and for this reason is compatible with the neoliberal subject who must manipulate and manage themself to achieve their goals.

On the same occasion, Alaska is critiqued by the judges for fading behind the other queens[54], which is a recurrent theme of the show - the shyer queens need to show more of their "personality" and "get out of their cocoons" so as to not be overshadowed by more outgoing contestants. If, on the one hand, the competitors are encouraged to displaying their personalities and not shy away, on the other hand they are reprimanded if considered too confident - instead, they are supposed to show they can hear the judges' critiques and improve based on those. Thus, vulnerability comes to mean at once the exposure of one's imperfections and weaknesses beyond the comedic and the genuine opening of one's heart and ears beyond competitivity.[55]

If vulnerability is devalued and resisted by hegemonic liberal discourses, as discussed above, RuPaul's deployment of vulnerability attempts to counterweight this rejection by affirming that appearing too self-sufficient may go against oneself in some contexts. I contend that in so doing RuPaul contributes to the constitution of a new version of neoliberal subjectivity - one that integrates vulnerability (as one's relatable weaknesses) into the identitarian model of sincere subjecthood. Vulnerability, this way, is cast not as the exception for an otherwise impermeable and fully-bounded whole, but as the template of a norm that praises the genuine approachability that accompanies the exposure of vulnerability. RuPaul's arrangement of vulnerability, although seemingly seeking to value feminine relationality and care over masculine closure and independent autonomy, actually reinforces a notion of *authentic* selfhood that legitimates gender oppression.[56]

[54] The judges also say they are getting bored because her looks are too repetitive. Although she receives all these criticisms, she ends up being "safe" - in fact, she never went to the "bottom two", which is the two who had the worst performance in the challenge and runway.

[55] RuPaul asks Shannel to do this in the third episode of the first season of the show.

[56] In the sense that women have been discriminated against on grounds of lacking authenticity: as delusional, manipulative, and unreliable, their saying is given no value or legitimacy by hegemonic systems of domination.

To put it differently, vulnerability works as a remedy for excessive self-esteem, a humble reminder of the queen's humanity and approachability. But in positioning humanity as belonging to an authentic and cohesive self (the "heart" of Alaska), vulnerability is cast back into the neoliberal logics of individual success that privileges masculine self-sameness over feminine fluidity.

Some critics of drag denounce the sexism and misogyny present in drag acts that contemptuously impersonate a stereotypical and denigrated version of femininity, usually "bitchy" and "competitive", which are already referred to by Newton (1972) when she affirms that "competition, distrust and scheming were commonplace. Cooperation was haphazard" (p. 125). Alaska's performance, in turn, stages a difference between "that kind of bitch", who speaks over one's back, and herself, who fearlessly criticizes people directly. She sings:

Now, I'm not the kind of bitch who's gonna go behind your back and talk shit on you
If I have an issue with you, I'll bring it right to your busted face
Now, let's discuss it right now, shall we?

Alaska distances herself from that other "kind of bitch" who is "shady"[57] and presents herself as assertive, outspoken and straightforward. That is, she is competitive but of a fair kind, and does not partake in intrigues and gossips, which reinstates a gendered binary: she is a competitive queen, but of the fair kind; she might antagonize with her sisters like but she possesses the masculine attributes of directness and transparency. According to Newton (1976), "all drag symbolism opposes the 'inner' or 'real' self (subjective self) to the 'outer' self (social self)" (p. 100). RuPaul presents such subjective self as not only masculine but also feminine because containing vulnerabilities: in this way, RuPaul resists the misogynist and transphobic[58] tradition common in drag strip-tease performances where the queen takes off the bra and shows a flat chest or speaks in a thicker voice so as to disclose her real masculine body (p. 101). Instead, RuPaul's Drag Race queens are supposed to distance from the trope of the misogynous gay man who is mocking femininity in their performances by showing a little of their own femininity (as in vulnerability) on stage. It is the femininity of the performer that is being offered as a site of identification for the audience, and not their masculinity (which supposedly lies underneath the layers of paintings and garments).

[57] A drag queen that "throws shade", that is, who indirectly criticizes or gossips about other queens.

[58] Transphobic insofar as it equates body components with identity claims - that is, associating the performer's masculine body with maleness.

Showing one's vulnerability then comes to mean showing not only one's strengths and what one is proud of, but also the things that hurt: telling "serious" and "real life" stories about oneself, like when Ongina confesses she is HIV positive[59]. As the weeks pass, the spectator gets more acquainted with each queen's stories of dealing with self-acceptance and tense relationships with family, overcoming diseases, thriving in spite of the unfavorable environment they grew up in etc. They explain their *motivation* behind choosing to do drag - the traumas and challenges faced by the contestants are talked about in the show as fuel for their creative process, earning in some cases a therapeutic undertone (as when drag leads to overcoming and healing from homophobic violence) and in others an activist connotation (as in "I do drag so that queer people will not suffer what I have suffered"). These narratives are presented in the show in a way that assumes a causal linearity between author and product, between performer and performance, and encourages a reading of their art as meaningful and intelligible.

While RuPaul's claim for vulnerability implicitly demands solidifying identities, Alaska's video clip mocks the pursuit of an inner self that ought to be uncovered on stage for the audience's benefit. Instead of adhering to the rules of the game, Alaska's video clip exposes how normative and absurd RuPaul's demand is. Also, she shows us what happens if we push that demand to its limits, if we follow the rules to their extremes, as if asking: what are the limits of exposing one's vulnerability? Does the audience actually *want* to watch a truly vulnerable queen, or do they just want a breath from the overtly campy/self-assuring queens?

Alaska, after showing herself marked and injured by her own words, appears backstage under a dim light, in a white long dress and with blurred makeup (Figure 8). She looks at the camera while singing the first two verses, and drinks a handful of pills with water from the tap (which is not a glamorous scene). She sings (my emphases):

Oh my gosh!
This is the *really serious* part of the song, do you hear that? (Oh, my God)
You see, there's something I have *to confess* (ohhh)
You and I have a lot more *in common* than I thought (What?)
And it's something I need to bring to your attention right now
Are you Ready? (Several times)

[59] This happens on episode four of the first season, in a dramatic scene where Ongina discloses her HIV positive status in tears after having won that week's challenge, which consisted in shooting a awareness raising commercial for MAC Viva Glam. Her concept for the commercial turned around "celebrating life". Ongina shares she was reluctant to disclose her secret on national television because her parents did not know about it then (she had HIV for two years back then).

Alaska responds to RuPaul's demands by giving what he wants - *seriousness* and *exposure* instead of (only) comedy and concealment. If we consider the third verse seriously, we can interpret RuPaul's demand as a demand for a confession. In a way, he requests Alaska to *come out* (again): this time, not to disclose her sexual identity but her essence, her "heart".

Showing one's vulnerability becomes like showing one's sex - it holds the promise of liberation from and transgression of the imposition of individual sovereignty and sefl-sufficieny. As mentioned in the introduction, Foucault (1988) delineates the process according to which sex, because understood to be repressed by the civilizatory process, is posited as containing the subject's truth and nature. In this sense, vulnerability, like sexuality, stands in for the truth behind the "mask" of competitivity, the essence that was severed from ourselves by what is required of us by discourses of liberal autonomy. Once one's vulnerability (as RuPaul uses it) is disclosed, the subject may be free from the impossible endeavor of attaining a coherent and continuous self. Disclosure and visibility comes to be associated in RuPaul's discourse with (masculine) self-assertion while secrecy is cast as belonging to the (feminine and lacking) homosexual who lives an artificial and covered life full of lies and falsehood.[60]

RuPaul's show, aligned with gay pride politics, adds a big amount of importance to truth and what is "real", repudiating in the process what constitutes so much of gay/lesbian experience - the possibility of passing, of altering bodily movements to come across as straight. According to Sedgwick (1990), regimes of visibility are particularly pertinent for homosexuals because of homosexuality's "epistemological distinctiveness" - unlike subjects stigmatized by "gender, age, size, physical handicap" or, in most cases, race, gay identity shares with "ethnic/cultural/religious oppression" the possibility of being hidden and disclosed. (p. 75) Certainly, there are various limitations[61] of this analogy between each form of oppression, but what I want to call attention here is that the demanding for the "truth" to always emerge dismantles the erotics and fantasies of secrecy. There is an allure of being in the closet, and not only that of safety - it is mainly the fascination with uncertainty and with subcultural signs of queerness that are invisible to straight people.

To sum up my argument so far: doing drag is all about being and acting exaggerated, extravagant, over-the-top, excessive. But RuPaul asks the participants of his TV show to *not only* embody this hyperbolic gay aesthetic *but also* show their "true selves". In his attempt to make the show more watchable for straight audiences (my assumption), he ends up reinforcing the liberal privileging of authenticity and self-sameness over theatricality. This approach attempts to

[60] I will explore this further in the next chapter when discussing gay pride's relationship with regimes of visibility.

[61] Sedgwick points out seven differences between these by analyzing the Biblical passage of queen Eszter's "coming out" as a jewish to her husband in order to save her people from genocide.

normalize and redeem drag by making use of authenticity to legitimate these acts as "coming from the heart" and being "meaningful" for the performers.

I would argue instead that the vulnerability we watch on stage is performatively produced in the very moment it is exposed, that this vulnerable self that RuPaul wants revealed is actually contingent to the event of performance and emerges in the very moment of being recognized.[62] Alaska's camping theatricalization of the disclosure of vulnerability exposes the constructed nature of the sincere, relatable, and serious vulnerable self: her vulnerability is not "exposed" but emerges in and through the encounter with Mathu's utterance - which does not mean it should be considered less mobilizing or worthy of consideration. I interpret the utterance "Your makeup is terrible" as a naming, an interpellation that brings the addressee into existence *as a failed being.*[63] Thought that way, Alaska's vulnerability - which contributes to her identity as susceptible to naming (represented in Figure 22 as the impression of names on her skin and the bruised eye that accompanies it) is not what lies "underneath" Alaska-diva but is *founded* by the subjugating words of the title of the song.

For achieving this effect of fabricated selfness, Alaska plays with editing and continuity: before shaving her hair is blonde but while shaving her hair is black (See figures 27 and 28, separated in the video clip by a long pause of 40 seconds in which we are presented to the vulnerable Alaska (Figure 29, 30, 31, and 32)).[64] Here, she parodies the confessional tone of RuPaul's Drag Race and suggests that the public is so eager to hear a confession that it does not matter if the secret is actually real or not. What matters is that the vulnerability being exposed must only *look* authentic*,* that is, it must only *resemble* a secret. In other words, it is in insisting that Alaska represses her vulnerability that her vulnerable self emerges, as a result of RuPaul's interpellation: the same discourse that promotes the liberation of her inner self from the constrains of comedy and competitivity constitutes what is supposedly underneath, covered, denied. From RuPaul's demand emerges a different Alaska than the one that existed previously: her own subjecthood is fabricated in this encounter. What Alaska is saying is that her vulnerability is as artificial as her "sticky characters": is also performed and architected with certain goals in mind.

Alaska's reclaiming of authenticity redefines it in ways that are less implicated in the neoliberal binaries of true/false, good/bad, original/copy. Authenticity can come to mean what is *enabling*, what deserves our attention, care, and engagement. After all, considering something authentic engenders an affective relating to that something fully and enable serious consideration

[62] Ongina's HIV status exists outside of her narration, of course, but in framing this fact as part of the performer's vulnerable and genuine self is to add certain meanings and values to it.

63 As noted by Butler (1997), interpellation does not *describe* but rather *inaugurates* a subjective reality (p. 33).

[64] Moreover, the shots of her shaving are out of a chronological and sequential order.

- because it is *legit,* it is legitimated and thus is deserving of interaction. Instead of being suspicious of its veracity and anxious about a disclosure of inveracity (which constitutes the paranoid position) a reformed notion of authenticity may lead to the engage with the object in its complexity of original and fakeness, newness and derivativeness, sincerity and pretension (which characterizes the reparative position). Instead of seeking for the true self underneath the mask, authenticity could come to mean what is properly *generative*: the vulnerability that RuPaul longs to see in drag performance does not speak to the performer's identity but to the mobilizing effects of the act. In a reparative move, authenticity can start to mean not what *deserves* serious engagement but simply what does engender reactions in us and remind us of our own vulnerability.

The facefication of vulnerability occurs when vulnerability is stripped from the domain of ontology, identity, and becomes/returns to an ethical imperative of care that follows from the expression of an intransitive capacity to suffer. Such process depends on the way vulnerability is presented as well as how it is received, which takes me to the scene in which Mathu approaches Alaska from behind - which I read as the only scene where she is not camping but, in offering her body to the encounter with Mathu she provides the possibility of emergence of her "face". In this scene, the emphasis on the visual is switched to the tactile: these shots focus less on the final composition of the colors and more in the synesthetic process of coloring, marking, altering and blurring their bodies. According to Ahmed (2004), *contingency* shares an etymologic root with *contact* (p. 28), which turns me now from a discussion of the contextual emergence of the vulnerable to self to how this is challenged by the very tactual proximity that made it possible. in this sense, vulnerability (as impressibility) can be redefined as an openness to the encounters that move us. Let us consider these topics in more detail in the next section.

Figure 27

Figure 28

Relatability, Testimony, and Ethics of Risk

As I have shown, the rationale for RuPaul's request is that the exposure of vulnerability would allow the public to identify with the queens besides laughing at (or with) them. Vulnerability is understood in individualized terms since it serves to approximate the idol to the fan by showing they are not all that different since both have weaknesses and are prone not only to failing but also to being affected by failing. The relatability trait enables the comparison and acknowledgement of likenesses between spectator and performer: it works as a bridge that connects two elements (and as such establishes their distinctiveness). Relatability has to do with being approachable *despite* the seeming absolute difference[65] - it causes the effect of "it could have been me up there", which evokes the hopes and dreams to ascend into fame and glory[66]. This way, the similarity revealed underneath the distinctiveness of the other is constituted as their authentic core.

RuPaul asks Alaska to confess she is actually not as inviolable as she seems, and this is what Alaska shows in the video clip: that she is also vulnerable to suffering when criticized. Alaska confesses backstage that "you and I have a lot more *in common* than I thought": the perfect alien-diva and the earthling (spectator), whose makeup is terrible, have a common ground to relate to after all since both are vulnerable to being hurt by the other's speech. We may say then that the audience's assumed vulnerability works only as *an enabler of identification*.

Pageant and clown[67] queens distance themselves from the audience they entertain, looking outstandingly beautiful or detachedly funny on the runway or stage. In turn, Ongina is not idealized or laughed at but, by way of staging the hurtful effects of violence on themselves, provide a space for the audience to identify with the performer and imagine themselves in the performer's turbulent situation, a way of showing that the event of aggression could have happened to oneself. Megan

[65] It would be nonsense to describe something or someone as relatable if it resembles its surroundings from the outset.
66 For instance, a member of aristocracy is relatable when they display having a mundane characteristic despite everything about them being flagrantly different from the "common people".
[67] Also called "comedy queens", their looks are even more exaggerated and childish/doll-like.

Boler (1997) poses this mode of empathetic social imagination as the preferred strategy for multiculturalism to bridge differences and enable democratic dialogue. She considers the "risks" of operating empathy to relate to narratives of historical events (in her case, the Nazi Holocaust) and proposes a testimonial witnessing of these accounts. The author argues that because empathy entails identification (through imagining oneself *as* the other in a certain situation), the self/other difference that enables empathy is collapsed into sameness (p. 258). That is, otherness is consumed through the projection of the self onto the other, a critique that, David Marshall (1988) reminds us, was posed by Hobbes and Mandeville already in the XVII century.

I contend that in foregrounding "relatability", and thus empathy[68], RuPaul encourages a distanced mode of watching the performances and relating to the show which forecloses the possibility of an encounter with difference (as Otherness) while reinforcing a static notion of identity - that is, a look that takes part of the ethical responsibility towards the vulnerable other away. Marshall (1988) affirms that "both Brecht and Rousseau objected to the self-congratulatory sympathy that turns people into passive spectators both inside and outside of the theater." (p.143 - 144). Rousseau affirms that the sympathy aroused in the audience only "teaches us how to replace real sympathy with a painless representation or imitation of sympathy" (p.143). Calling it "sterile", "transitory", and "vain", Rousseau defends that theatrical sympathy alienates because leads to no social action - in fact, in eliciting such reaction from the audience, theatre is accused of teaching how not to engage in the "real" social and political world by providing an artificial representation of it as substitute (p. 142). In this sense, Boler (1997) agrees with Rousseau when she criticizes "passive empathy" for holding no guarantee that any real action towards social justice will follow - one might feel more altruistic and less guilty while learning about the other's situation, but it does not follow that one will realize and question one's "complicity in structures of power relations mirrored by the text" (p. 258). I agree with such critiques insofar as they highlight the narcissism of an empathetic process that constitute the self as considerate and politically engaged; however, I depart from this line of thought because I do take the experience of watching a performance to have a significance of its own beyond any social utility for the "outside world", beyond any action that follows.

In a "testimonial" approach, the reader self-reflexively reconsiders themself in their complicity in a field of forces in which *analogous* violences take place (p. 267). A testimonial reading puts the reader on the spotlight and takes away their relatively comfortable and distanced position towards the narration, which is a move not to re-center the self as the source of every problem and

[68] I define empathy as "putting oneself in the other's shoes", that is, as seeing the situation from the other's standpoint. Sympathy, in turn, which encompasses the notion of pity, occurs then one feels sorry for the other, more often expressed in compassionate acts of charity in which a hierarchy is (re)established.

to make a *mea culpa* of sorts, but a resistance to disengaging with the struggle for social justice. If putting an emphasis on empathy might reduce the sense of guilt that such tragedies happened, to focus on bringing guilt "back" would be a mistake: as Butler (2005) noted, guilt and bad consciousness are forms of negative narcissistic emotions, and as such reinforce a sense of self-sufficiency by folding the subject back into themself while moving away from "impressionability, susceptibility, and vulnerability" (p. 100). Testimonial witnessing entails acknowledging our responsibility of caring the Other because of their vulnerability, but, I argue, it also entails being transformed throughout the encounter.

Moreover, Boler criticizes empathy for failing to account for the specificities of the addressed situation since it relies on what she calls "flattened historical sensibility" (p. 255). That is, in the process of identification the report of trauma is decontextualized - because the reader believes they "understand" and "feel" what the other had experienced, the unrepresentability of trauma is disregarded. I agree with Boler especially when she defends that the strangeness of the narrative should not be subsumed into comprehension (which leads to ontology, identity, and meaning) but related to otherwise. According to Shildrick (2002) "(i)n the encounter with the strange, we do no more than grasp the other, strip away her difference, and assimilate her to our selves (…) Removed, then, from its alterity, difference is put to the service of the same and becomes lost in the totalization of being." (p. 89). However, as the abject, Otherness always returns when cast away, it does not matter how As Shildrick puts it: "The point is not that I cannot respond with violence, but that it will fail in its aim; in absolute alterity, the other, that which is non-self, is always beyond my grasp." (p.91). For Boler, reading the story as a testimony means considering it does not provide a totalizing account of the situation since the genre of testimony cannot assure its own claim to truth (p. 264).

To treat testimony seriously, she argues, is to embrace its uncertainty and inconclusiveness: "testimony denies the reader's desires for certainty; the emphasis on language as practice, as action, replaces coherence and resolution with vulnerability and ambiguity" (p.266). In this line, I ask: what if we take Alaska's representation of injury not as a *description* or a *report* (that explains in details "what happened" and invites the listener to share their feelings) but as a *testimony*, in all its situatedness that implicates the "listener"'s ethical responsibility (beyond a fear that the violence that occurred to the other might occur to them)?

Boler's testimonial reading resonate in various aspects with Shildrick's (2002) ethics of risk, which rethinks vulnerability as a propensity to being affected and to forming new bondings from that affection:

> Though the constructs of modernity might seem to promise a limited security, they do so only at the cost of a violent and exclusionary ethic that can encompass neither other modes of being, nor yet internal change and indistinction. To resist closure, to be open to the trace of the other within, the other that is both self and irreducibly alien in its excess, to resist the normalisation of the strange, is to accept vulnerability. It is the very possibility of our becoming, for ourselves and with others, and it commands us to give up the comfort of familiarity and willingly embrace the risky ethics of uncertainty. (p.132)

The overcoming of vulnerability envisioned by neoliberal subjectivity presupposes/follows from a closure to Otherness: as noted by Shildrick (2002), the ontological impulse which enables the constitution of identity and selfhood, entails a violent mastery over the alterity that emerges from the "face". (p.91) That is, the self, as a coherent and bounded unity, emerges by way of disavowing its own vulnerability to the irresistible demand for care from the Other. In other words, one cannot not respond to the "face" because of its constitutive defenseless - and because one holds no control over that responsibility, one is made vulnerable.

If we consider Mathu to be relating to Alaska's "face", we may think of a way of performing reparation towards ourselves, who may be at once oppressors (when she utters "Your Makeup Is Terrible" – Figure 31) and carers (when she holds her head closely without expecting reciprocity - figure 32). Reparation entails a love that coexists with hate - and that is why a fear of destroying the loved object is prevalent in this position. According to Kristeva (2000), depressive anxieties emerge due to precisely this ambivalence towards the depressive's object, that is, once we bear aggressive impulses towards the same object we also care about and love (p. 76). That being said, by reading Mathu reparatively we can bare the fact that in the same person violence can give way to care, that assimilation and care are not binary opposites but are more like "positions", ways of relating to Otherness that must coexist - the first as a conservative (as in provider of constancy) survival operation, while the second as a queer disruption of individuality.

Interpreting Ongina's performing body as indexing a racialized (Southeast Asian American) femininity, to cover her own body with red lipstick comes to signal the virtual impossibility of achieving hegemonic "beauty" for a racialized body, which is considered either yellow or red, either "exotic" or "awkward", either "lacking adornments" or "excessively decorated" and never quite right.[69] Acknowledging that the pursuit of hegemonic beauty is unachievable for the racialized body, Ongina provides a space for belonging to these social outcasts once they identify with her outsiderness: community is formed by sharing a marginal positioning in society, not unlike the

[69] Nao Bustamante's performance *America the Beautiful* explores this perpetual inadequacy of the racialized body in achieving normative standards of beauty: Bustamante, a latino performer, impersonates a woman in stark need of approval from the audience who does various amateurish tricks to please the audience and receive their admiration, but never getting satisfied.

space bell hooks (1989) envisions. By choosing to inhabit the margins which was imposed into one, a place of radical openness and resistance is engendered. I agree with her in that the mere coexistence with difference (or "different others") does not ensure that a contact with Otherness is taking place. However, while such marginal spaces are affirmative of certain minoritarian subjectivities (in hooks' case, black poor American) by way of founding a counter-language that stands against the hegemonic order, the community-in-vulnerability I imagine here is less oppositional and more open to transformation in identity.

In this line, the kind of ethics I am putting forward here does not only implicate the reader but also entails a *dirty* "looking" towards the other's vulnerability, a mode of seeing that gives up the idea of a distant spectator who leaves the encounter untouched; that is, I am arguing in favor of an *involved* gaze that acknowledges and elaborates the transformation that inevitably undergoes in our encounter with the Other. As an uncanny encounter with what Boler (1997) calls "estrangement and unfamiliarity" (p. 266), I argue that a testimonial reading triggers a trouble of selfhood by way of challenging its own stable and discrete identity.

Instead of feeling hostile towards the unfamiliar (as hate-infused conservative politics do) or turning a blind eye on them in favor of what is familiar (as a multicultural approach does), Tim Dean (2009) puts forward an erotics of hospitality towards the unknown: an intimacy with the other *as other* is made possible if we dismiss our need for *knowledge* or *identification* (p. 211). Tim Dean argues that the gay practice of cruising (defined by him as having sex with strangers without "taming" their strangeness[70]) holds a critical potential for inter-class contacts (which is of the interest of urban safety[71] and democracy more generally). That is, the stranger, kept in their unintelligibility, is related to not through identity but through affections. The author points out also that otherness does not equal difference (p. 206), and that otherness is also present within (and founds) the subject. He proposes the subculture of bareback promiscuity as exemplary to an ethics of openness to alterity (p. 176) based on unpredictable encounters and fueled by pleasure instead of altruism. His emphasis is on a practice that aims at nothing but the present: this "nonpurposive disposition" (p. 207) resists the allure of teleology and seeks only pleasure, a pleasure that is not only physiological. For him, "there is pleasure and satisfaction in risking the self by opening it to alterity", which differ from the ones that result from securing the self (p. 210).

By the end of the video clip, both Alaska and Mathu embrace the "risky ethics of uncertainty" differently. Alaska's gesture of shaving as she is criticized for her bad makeup poses

[70] Dean pointedly reminds us that commodifying or seducing the stranger might cause a domestication of the otherness of the encounter, which is precisely what he wants to signal for its critical ethical potential. (p. 179)

[71] Part of his contribution in this essay is the deconstruction of the binary safety-risk, which he argues to come together: the more risk we take in our contacts with otherness, the more safe society becomes. (p. 190)

a provocative question: if she gives Mathu another reason for injuring me, will she hit me again? In offering the other face, and with no guarantee that the aggressor will not hit again, she presents her own "face". In turn, Mathu is transformed as she relates to Alaska's "face" - she allows to be affected and have her individuality challenged in the encounter. As posed by Shildrick (2002), an encounter with the Stranger is "a breach in the self-sufficiency of the one, an opening to, and acceptance of, exteriority" (p. 89).

Figure 31

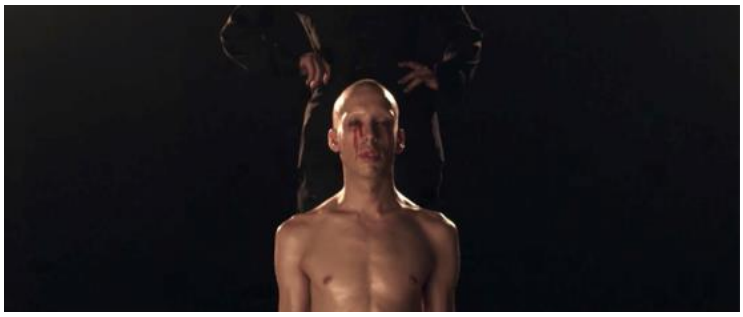

Figure 30

Figure 29

Acknowledging that the other is never completely reachable may lead to question the primacy of the "I" and blur the self-other boundaries. The continuity of the scenes is manipulated once again in this scene: Mathu is first dressed while the paints are being thrown at the two (Figure 32); then, when the paints hit their skin, she is shown shirtless, without a dress or bras and showing her hairy chest (but still wearing nails, wig and makeup, see Figure 33). This way, the colorful

powder hits them both in their bare skin (closeup in the queen's face and nipple, and Alaska's face and shoulder (Figures 34, 35, 36, and 37). However, considering the fast speed they are presented (about 2 seconds each shot), it is hard to recognize to which body do these images belong to, disturb this way the difference between self and the other - they both are consumed by a colorful paint that erases their difference of status.[72] What does it matter if Alaska's makeup is terrible now that they are covered?

Figure 32

Figure 33

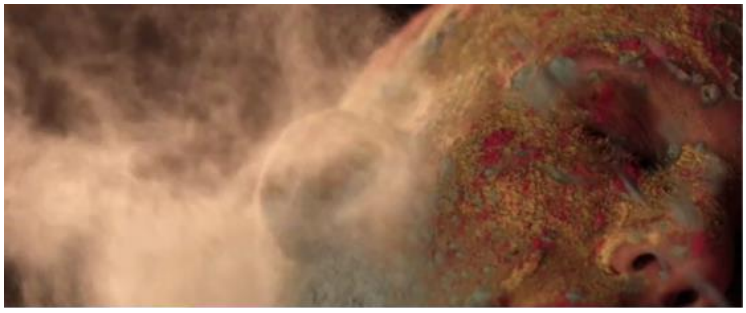

Figure 34

[72] It is important to note that the corporeal indistinction that results from being painted by and with the other in the occasion of the Encounter is different from the one that projective identification engenders - while the former embraces the instability of selfhood, the latter is self-congratulatory (for resisting self-absorption and signaling a civic commitment on the life of others) while in fact consuming otherness into sameness.

Figure 37

Figure 36

Figure 35

According to Ahmed (2004), the skin can be thought "as that which appears to contain us, but as where others impress upon us" (p. 101): the painting of one's own body, like in Ongina's performance, may be interpreted as the affective excess that results from the encounter with alterity, an overflowing experience that may unite people in their moments of lack of self-control. Forming communitarian bonds through this risky ethics means to acknowledge that what is shared is not a trait (of having a terrible makeup), affect (shame), or positionality (marginality) but an embodiment prone to being painted, marked, named, which opens up the space for more inclusive communities whose members are - somewhat like communities based on failure - not requested to remain the same but in fact are driven to self-transformation.

In this chapter I first discussed how traditional hegemonic neoliberal discourses allocate vulnerability in the abject by building a masculinist ideal of sovereignty and autonomy. Then, I

analyzed RuPaul's[73] demand that Alaska show her vulnerability in his TV show, which I interpreted as as a call for relatability and empathy with the spectator, a vulnerability that in being camped about in Alaska's video clip is exposed in its contingent and theatrical status. Finally, I have discussed the shortcomings of relying on empathy/relatability and outlined an ethics of risk and uncertainty embraced by Alaska, who puts her own body at the mercy of Mathu, whom in turn lets themself be affected by that queer encounter.

[73] To be clear, I refer to the RuPaul as he behaves on his TV show, and not about his ideas in interviews (which I have mentioned in the Introduction and differ partly).

Chapter Three - Shame, Performativity, and Reparation

In this chapter, I argue that the deployment of shame by Ongina and Alaska at once exposes the assumed binaries of multicultural pride discourse and suggests a reparative ethics of depressive love by inviting a closer look to their faces. If in the previous chapter I focused on the material vulnerability of the subject, I move on now to consider the dangers of losing dignity by expressing how dependent on the other's gaze we are. Tomkins (1995) asks: "How can loss of face be more intolerable than loss of life?" (p. 136). I start by delineating the multicultural binary opposition between pride and shame, structured around ideological regimes of visibility, by analyzing Aguilera's video clip. Then, I redefine shame based on Ongina's performance and taking into account its performativity. Finally, I sketch an ethics that seeks less to identify with the other's shame than to reparatively love it while embracing provisional (dis)identities.

The rationale for this chapter is influenced largely by Sedgwick's (2003) discussion on how writer Henry James found a way of loving his younger self *through* shame, and not *despite* of it: James, in the occasion of writing the prefaces for an edition of his complete oeuvre, faced an immature version of himself, who wrote works he was not proud of; but instead of repudiating the shame he felt for his younger self he chose to *reparent* him in what became at once a homosexual and an intergenerational relationship that *eroticized* the differences (between the actual and the adult ideal) that brought about a sense of shame.

According to a neoliberal rhetoric of self-empowerment, shame itself is what is considered shameful as it signals an individual's failure in dealing with their own failures "properly" by overcoming them and turning them in pride. In turn, Ongina cannot (or simply does not) "correctly" mimic the process of empowerment the characters in Aguilera's video clip undergo - her imitation flops and she falls to the ground instead of rising above her "opponents". In turn, by shaving after being accused of having a terrible makeup, Alaska enlarges this gap between her look and that of ideal femininity - in crying (and so making her makeup even more terrible) and shaving she adds another layer of failure, another reason to be ashamed - that of embodying a "bad" femininity, unrestrained and discomposed. It is my contention that in the shame-inducing gap between the actual and the ideal lies the possibility of a renegotiation of our ethical bonds once these are shown to be essential to the subject. Both Ongina and Alaska's impersonation of the trope of the (proud) diva in the first half of their performances trouble the claims to legitimacy of pride - while Ongina performs tragically a shame that overwhelms her own sense of self, Alaska camps about shame itself, showing its theatrical aspect and taking away its severity.

Halperin (2012) asserts that "[o]fficial, public, out-and-proud gay identity has no tolerance for shame, solitude, secretiveness, and no patience for those who choose to wallow either in an abject state of emotional isolation (…)" (p.94). That is, identifying as gay and belonging to a gay community means sharing a (sub)culture which excludes those who are ashamed because they are considered to be "infected" with the destructive beliefs of oppressive discourses. Feminist authors also subscribe to this rationale, such as Sandra Bartky (1990) when affirming that "[t]he need for secrecy and concealment that figures so largely in the shame experience is disempowering as well, for it isolates the oppressed from one another and in this way works against the emergence of a sense of solidarity" (p. 97). This way, a binary is established between the shameful-solitary-secret life of closeted feminized homosexuals and that of proud-sociable-open masculinized ones.[74]

Multicultural gay pride - as embodied by Aguilera - articulates a progress narrative of coming out of the closet and in a binary (visibility, community, freedom, and power on the one side and invisibility, loneliness, limitation, and weakness on the other).[75] However, if the performativity of shame is considered we find that shame shares with pride an exhibitionist and performative character. Based on Tomkins' theorization, Sedgwick aligns "pride" with "dignity", "self-display" and "exhibitionism" (p. 38), while resisting to position shame as its binary opposite: shame is also a performance, but one that complicates the gendered distinction outlined before between visibility and invisibility. Ongina exposes how the failure of shame is not the failure of absorption and loneliness, but that of being compelled to relationality.

Affects, as defined by Tomkins, are expressed in the face and for that are intrinsically social, communicative. Shame holds a special status among the nine basic human affects because it comprises an ambivalence between showing and hiding one's face, between exhibiting and concealing one's face; in the blushing is the paradox of exposing and communicating one's shyness and embarrassment form being looked at. The first frame of Beautiful's video clip shows Aguilera, having noticed the presence of a spectator, saying "Don't look at me" as she turns her face away from the camera.

Tomkins (1995) posits that shame signals that the partial contempt of the other towards us - or a part of us - was not enough to reduce the positivity of our attachment (p. 157). That is, for Tomkins (1995a), shame involves the wish "to reconnect with the other, to recapture the

[74] The gender binary established distinguishes between the parading of masculinity (the exposure of phallic capacities) and the masquerading proper of femininity, which predicates on the concealment of power (as competence) so as to reinforce and mirror masculinity's authority.

[75] This multicultural progress narrative also encloses shame into both the past and the Global South/East as spaces of retrograde ideology that were not "informed" by the most recent Western democratic deliberations. Such narrative poses a civilized evolution from shame to pride, from exclusion to acceptance, from ignorance to information, from hate to toleration…

relationship that existed before the situation turned problematic" (p. 400), because we hope we can regain the other's love. As affirmed by Elspeth Probyn (2005) "(…) the reduction of interest that prompts shame is always incomplete. As such, shame promises a return of interest, joy, and connection" (p. xiii).

Shame, then, results from a moral judgment (either of one subject to another or of one part of the self toward another) in which love is withheld "until some atonement and restitution has been made, along with renunciation" of the source of distress (p. 157). Such distressing element (either a lack in skill, a flaw or a moral fault) receives the status of failure as a result from eliciting shame. Shame, thus, entails a letting go of a part of the self in face of a conditional promise of love.[76] Sedgwick (2003), however, departs from Tomkins in this regard affirming that…

> The forms taken by shame are not distinct "toxic" parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead *integral to and residual* in the processes by which identity itself is formed. They are available for the work of *metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, transfiguration*, affective and symbolic loading and *deformation*, but perhaps all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure (p. 63, emphasis mine).

In this line, I ask: how can we think of reclamation beyond pride, how can we find alternatives to assert extravagant flamboyance, assured butchness, sexual promiscuity as a source of pride? In other words, how can failure, as that which disturbs the other to the point of constituting a barrier to their attachment to us, how can its critical potential be retained even if it is "reframed, refigured, transfigured" in the experience of shame?

Tomkins (1995) typifies two affective reactions that may occur alongside shame: the paranoid evocation of fear and terror from an "exaggerated awareness of being looked at" (p.148), and the depressive's "exaggerated awareness of the humiliating consequences of not being looked at and of losing the attention of the other" (p. 148). I consider in this chapter the multiculturalist take on pride/shame - informed by a neoliberal rationale of individual self-assertion - as paranoid-schizoid; while the queer politics of Ongina/Alaska as depressive/reparative.

Pride/Shame Binary and the Politics of Liberation Through Visibility

[76] The risk involved in such a giving up of a part of oneself for the love of the other is that of becoming a martyr and end up being praised for our sacrifice, which would only reinforce one's ego.

Pride invites the spectators to tune in - it comprises an involving joy that works through mimicry and reproduction through identification. Alaska embodies a hubristic[77] persona who delights on her fame and is "bitchy" with her sisters[78], criticizing them only to magnify her own ego. Alaska's empowered persona is so charismatic and fascinating in her self-confidence that she works as a sort of role-model. Unlike Alaska's rendition of the prideful diva, Ongina's proud impersonation (which echoes Aguilera and is present on the first half of her act) is appealing because of her kindness: she smiles and kisses two members of the audience when they approach the stage to tip her. However, both Alaska and Ongina share an empowered and self-affirming stance. According to a liberationist multiculturalist discourse shame constitutes a lack in creative autonomy that entraps the oppressed subject to remain attached to the norms that make them suffer - in other words, a feminized position, since, as suggested by Warner (2009), masculinity is constructed as immune to shame through parading, that is, the showing off of (phallic) muscles and skills (p. 290). When Aguilera sings that "Now and then I get insecure/ From all the pain, I'm so ashamed", she speaks from within a neoliberal injunction of foregoing shame. According to this approach this affect indexes susceptibility and lack of sovereignty: expressing pain, thus, turns into a sign of weakness and indignity because it foregrounds how impressionable one is[79], assigning little importance to encounters (considered incidental and merely associative).

This way, shame was conceptualized by several authors as consisting in a failure of the individual in *liberating* themself from the repressive (hetero)norms embodied in the figure of the aggressors whose abjection of gayness was not properly rejected (constituting thus a sign of internalized homophobia). For instance, hooks (2003), included in this (paranoid) trend of dealing with negative affects as a sign of a successful operation of oppression, affirms that "[w]ithout critical vigilance, shaming as a weapon of psychological terrorism can damage fragile self-esteem in ways that are irreparable." (p. 99) In other words, as Nadine Hubbs (2009) proposed, feeling shame is interpreted as a failure of taking control over one's life and a lack in autonomy and self-determination (p. 114). Following this same logic, Hanson (2009) affirms that "shame is pathologized as an anomaly to be purged through self-assertion, a readjustment of one's values, a liberation of one's libido, a transcendence of adverse circumstances, a robust *no* spoken to power" (p. 137 - 138).

[77] Hubris, which is the Christian use of pride as one of the seven cardinal sins, is the term used to define an overall state of pride (as opposed to being proud of something in particular). It is associated with *disdain, overconfidence, arrogance,* often associated with an ego-centric contempt which helps demarcating the self's identity by separating the self from the non-self.

[78] A term of endearment with which drag queens refer to each other.

[79] Patriarchy's ideal successful adult subject - a master of oneself - prides themself in holding control of what "comes in" (his body, mind, property) and what does not, what is internalized and what is left at a distance.

Aguilera's addressees are overburdened with the excess of gaze from the other, which marks their failures and leads them to hide away and desire to be invisible. Her solution is to dismiss those judging looks by affirming the ashamed they are enough, that they do not need to aspire to become *like* the hegemonic ideal (of muscular men, thin women etc.). A black woman tears apart the cover of a "Chic" magazine that figures a white model and throwing it into the fireplace (Figure 38); the skinny boy starts exercising so as to enhance his muscles as he wishes to (Figure 39); and the anorexic girl who smashes the mirror that torments her with her own image (Figure 40), which together come to represent the *liberation* from exclusionary and oppressive norms.

Figure 38

Figure 39

Figure 40

Finally, Ongina sings by the mirror the verse that encompasses this liberationist approach to oppression: "Words can't bring me down". Aguilera's anthem disavows the vulnerability of being shamed in place of self-affirmation - or, better, it disavows the traces of shame in the subject, its long-lasting and latent effects in the (de)formation of subjectivity. But if Ongina starts her act beautiful and proud while acclaiming her beauty, she becomes over-confident. Another possible

interpretation for the source of Ongina's shame is her excessive self-aggrandizement, which is also repudiated by a multicultural discourse that emphasizes cooperation and community formation.

Instead of a passive endorsement of hegemonic ideas, I understand shame to be the trace of an investment in an object that performs at once violence and recognition upon the self; That concomitantly brings the self into being and keeps it in a subjugated place of powerlessness; such an attachment is maintained by the shame-subject not because of inertia (or convenience) but through an agentive investment, a melancholic refusal to let go of its object, as I will describe later. Shame signals that there is still a supposition of value in the other who makes us feel ashamed, or, better, that it is still worth to devote energy to recover and sustain this attachment with hopes of regaining its force.

The multicultural discourse of (gay) pride does not abolish shame's importance completely: as suggested by Halperin and Traub (2009), gay pride "is still powered by the transformative energies that spring from experiences of shame" (p. 44). We may affirm that liberal discourse adopts gay shame only as the fuel for individual emancipation: the negativity of shame in these terms is no more than a motor for coherence-building and self-affirmation, the backdrop against which the positivity of pride affirms and legitimates itself, the "dark place" nobody wants ever to return to. Can we imagine alternative ways in which shame is not transcended into pride? As claimed by Sedgwick (2003), Psychology played an important role in defining shame as "healthy" when it "preserves privacy and decency" and "unhealthy" when it "colludes with self-repression or social repression" (p. 64). However, I shall explore how shame may resist to maintain a moral distinction between public and private nor in adhering to the binaries of the repressive hypothesis if considered in its performativity.

In the second verse, Aguilera sets a distance from the aggressors, pointing out their flaws and incoherences so as to delegitimize their claims (assuming that for the claims to be effective they should be coherent with the author's identity and deeds):

To all your friends you're *delirious*
So *consumed*
In all your *doom*, ooh
Trying hard to fill the *emptiness*
The pieces gone
Left the puzzle undone
Ain't that the way it is

In this verse, her aggressor's claims are disregarded because she knows their motivation for that (insecurity and delirium). Aguilera does not seek retaliation nor to return the violence: she opts

instead to highlight their enemies' "doom", "emptiness" and "delirious". Aguilera's relation to the aggressor is contemptuous and pitiful, a condescending rejection of the allegedly invalid motivations behind their allegations.

For Tomkins (1995) contempt is "a powerful instrument of discrimination and segregation. By means of contempt, the other can be kept in his [sic] place. If, however, the response to contempt is shame, this characteristic consequence of distancing is much attenuated." (p. 158). He continues:

> Insofar as one responds to the contempt of the other with shame, one has not entirely accepted the disgust of the other. It is not difficult for one who is treated with contempt to respond with anger, or with counter-contempt to the other, or with self-contempt. To only partially accept the judgment of the other, however, by hanging the head in shame but not responding with self-disgust and revulsion is a difficult discrimination to maintain. (p. 158)

While shame "partially accepts the judgment of the other" pride *inverts* it, turning it upside down by delegitimating its claims and countering them with an opposite counter-discourse that claims "we are beautiful" when accused of being ugly. Multicultural separatist communities - like the one constituted in the duration of Beautiful's video clip - are based not only on its members' love/care for each other but also on the sharing of a minoritarian self-regard: we are all proud of ourselves for being different and in sharing this self-love we are *alike*. On the last chorus, Aguilera changes the subject to "we", "us", creating thus a community of people who recognize their own inner beauty: such realization of self-worth comes to bring together diverse people into a common feeling of being proud of their own distance from the hegemonic ideal and their proximity to the intrinsically self-referential model of multiculturalism. As represented on Aguilera's video clip, pride engenders a diminishing of interest in the aggressor so as to recenter the self as that which deserves our love and not our contempt[80]. Considering that responding to contempt with pride also produces a turning away from the aggressor, the original contempt can be considered *successful* as an instrument of "segregation and discrimination" since it managed to keep the abjected people at a distance.

Halperin and Traub (2009) pose the goals of gay pride to be "liberation, legitimacy, dignity, acceptance and assimilation, as well as the right to be different" (p. 3). The difference celebrated by contemporary gay politics is criticized by queer critics to be a sanitized version of sexual identity that leaves out much of the critical potential of queerness in name of property and decency. Pride

[80] Following this logic, camp, as a gay sensibility, can be interpreted as a way of regaining interest for straight culture by applying a gay lens to it.

enables the coming together, the looking outwards in search of confirmation as well as the altruistic gesture of sharing support - as Aguilera moves from priding herself up in the first verse to inspiring other shamed subject to follow her in the second verse. Beautiful's video clip moves from long and medium shots to close-ups in the characters faces, suggesting that while shame creates an indistinct crowd of inert and stuck individuals (represented by the back of a head, the surrounding darkness and the encumbrance that seems to hold them down on bed), pride is a locus of individual and lively differentiation.

When the focus of political efforts is concentrated on granting cultural visibility to abjected subjectivities by forming "positive" and "accurate" representations we dismiss the reality that these very subjectivities are publicly scrutinized and inspected in order to be kept at distance from the (middle class, white, heteronormative) respectable "majority" of society. Visibility in these terms entails a certain (moral) understanding that one form of visibility is preferred over another, that some representations - either for their accuracy (when measured in relation to their referent), expressiveness, or possession of positive and empowering traits (assumedly shared) - have more value than others, considered coercive and unauthentic.[81]

However, the secrecy of the closet should be considered to be oppressive not because it entails invisibility but because it confers too much visibility to the minoritarian subject: their sexual/cultural practices scrutinized by a prejudiced society's institutions (namely, Science, Law, Religion) while coming out and assuming a normalized gay identity can provide the safety of an assimilated invisibility. According to Muñoz (1999), "[t]he story of 'otherness' is one tainted by a mandate to 'perform' for the amusement of a dominant power bloc" (p. 187).[82] He calls it the "burden of liveness": minoritarian subjects[83] are compelled to perform live, a performance that "is positioned within the dominant culture as a substitute for historical and political representation" (p. 188). As such, the "burden of liveness" forestalls these subjects of affording "being a historical subject" and "thinking about the future" (p. 189).

What Ongina does, in turn, is to deconstruct that binary and show that being proud does not take us anywhere further but is the ends of a political agenda that can accommodate any identity claim; More specifically, while she impersonates the prideful diva she is just a regular drag queen with somehow predictable performances, another version of the same referent (celebrity

[81] The visibility promised by gay pride (the "out" of the closet) praises itself for its authenticity - that is, what is being rendered visible is legitimated by claiming itself as the truth about these subjects.

[82] For Muñoz, late capitalism compels poor immigrants, and the racialized working class more broadly, to work in illegal activities, one of them being the unregulated field of live performances.

[83] We may think how theatre is a feminized occupation at large; how queer people are compelled to entertain with their funny gender incongruity; how racialized bodies were historically coerced to perform as exotic; as well as freak shows, the participation of children acts in vaudeville etc.

femininity); it is only after she starts painting her face and body she starts being seen closely and in her singularity - it is a form of refusal to have her shameful particularities normalized and rendered simply "beautiful".

Reconsidering Shame in its Performativity

I argue in this section that the queer politics of Ongina provides another reading of the progress narrative of multiculturalism self-assertion (and coming out): from a state of hyper visibility when "in the closet" to invisibility (when normalized). If shame is reconsidered in its performativity this concept acquires a depressive connotation because it begins to indicate a wish for reconnection and to express the significance of being looked at, recognized, and loved.

One of Sedgwick's criticisms of the paranoid position is that it focuses too much on unmasking operations of power. The assumption that conferring visibility (to the workings of power relations) would inherently reduce their oppressive status or transform them misses the point that visibility not always accompanies truth, positivity or safety. She questions: "what does a hermeneutics of suspicion and exposure have to say to social formations in which visibility itself constitutes much of the violence?" (p. 140). In the same line, Peggy Phelan (1993) highlights "the incredible allure of being unseen when visibility has meant (and continues to mean) violence, imprisonment, death" (p. 104). Abjected subjects aspire to *pass* as normal, to disappear among the crowd - such is the appeal of normalization. After all, "blending in" - as a manipulation of one's racial, gender presentation - has always been used by minoritarian subjects as a survival technique of preventing hostility and performing a sense of belonging.

The fact that Ongina - as a person of color - is performing her suffering for the entertainment, amusement, and/or appreciation of the audience might be considered as another instance in which visibility can be the source and result of oppression. For instance, many scholars discussed the oppressive status of visibility on Andy Warhol's video Screen Test #2 (1965), which presents Mario Montez, a latino cross-dresser, feeling ashamed during a fictive audition for being humiliated by an (invisible) white director (Ronald Tavel) who requests her to perform a series of embarrassing acts. While Douglas Crimp (2009) praises the film's aestheticization of Mario's "irresistible, resplendent vulnerability" (p. 73), Jack Halberstam (2005) interprets the piece as a reproduction of racial regimes of oppression since the eventual pleasure evoked by watching it is experienced at the expense of a racialized subject's suffering, so that the audience (assumedly white)

does not need to be exposed to humiliation but are able to experience shame 'by proxy' through the screen (p. 225).

Thus, pride and shame are not to be considered a binary, and even less as substitutes: pride allows such explorations of shame by providing an affective bedrock[84]. Pride is vital for individuals in vulnerable conditions and affected by multiple oppressions because it is an affect with a distinctively potential for improving self-esteem. Moreover, Ongina can only employ shame only after she expresses the joy she feels to be on stage. For her expression of shame to come across as genuine, some interest in the audience must (appear to) have been formed since this affect is only experienced after interest was maintained: Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995) remind us that "[w]ithout positive affect, there can be no shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush" (p. 520). It is Ongina's interest in the audience that is built up during the first part of the performance to serve as the backdrop for shame: she first expresses enjoyment from performing, pride from being watched and inhabiting the space of the stage, so that afterwards she can be ashamed of not living up to the expectations - her own and the audience's imagined one. In other words, it is only because the audience can witness the joy that the song, our applauses, and cheering make an impression upon her that we can take her shame seriously.

Gay pride[85] discourses disregard the performativity of shame, that is, its theatrical status (as in "presented for an audience") and the promise of a reattachment contained in this affect. What Ongina shows with her serious and extreme performance is that shame requests a closer look to the face by, paradoxically, lowering the head, a distancing that approximates in its appeal for a refined gaze attentive to the details and singularity of the ashamed subject. In other words, shame has the potential of engendering queer bondings by the very obstruction to visibility, which is always partial and for that invites a detailed and sustained look on the face (Figure 41).

[84] For instance, queer oppositions to Gay Pride Parades are only made possibly as a post-Pride rationale. Silverstone (2012) discusses Duckie's Gay Shame events that would take place in London from 1996 to 2009: "Gay Shame's co-opting and reclaiming of scenes of historical (and present day) 'gay shame' – suicide, gay bashing, psychiatric diagnosis, for example – seem to emerge from a position of relative pride and safety, of the type that discourses of gay pride and Pride events seek to foster." (p.64)

[85] I would include black pride discourses too, but this comparison is not in the scope of this thesis.

Figure 41

The paranoid position is marked by the demand of immediate affection, attention, and support from the Other - its horizon is to let go of every necessity and dependency and arrive at the self-sufficient masculinist ideal embodied by the diva. Such is the paradox of gay pride politics - at once requests collective protection from the state in the form of rights (legitimated by their vulnerability to homophobic groups) - and asserts individual independence (by repelling for instance the trope of the needy performer whose emotional and financial dependency on the audience comes to signal a lack in individual integrity and moral fiber). The depressive position, in turn, instead of requesting love from the Other, mourns the Other's absence that indicates the Other is neither completely ours nor under our control. This way, the depressive position brings on a relative state of independence by way of an acknowledgement that the Other will not be always available to meet our needs - and that they are not the ones to blame for that, but can be loved even if they bring us distress.

Some criticisms to camp who interpret it as a sign of internalized homophobia focus in the fact that camp reinforces retrograde stereotypes of the (pre-Stonewall) sad, pathetic, and lonely gay man who mocks at oneself. On the one hand, Ongina resists to incorporate the independence of Aguilera's pride - not because pride will not take us anywhere, but because it might not take us much further, nor where it promises to take us. What Ongina asks is precisely "what if we actually *do need* attention and love"? What if we are not that independent, autonomous and self-sufficient as neoliberalism would like us to be? On the other hand, she does not demand immediate attention and adoration, but is able to sustain a depressive position marked by shame in which she expresses her undignified need of being seen and loved without requesting or supplicating for recognition.

The only scene where shame is represented on Alaska's video clip is when she reacts to the message that her makeup is terrible with a camp humor that transforms her shame into yet another

performance: feeling ashamed of herself while shaving and (artificially) crying and shouting "whyyyy?", she asks the mirror: "do you love me anyway?", which may be interpreted as "Do *I* love *me* anyway?".[86] For Sedgwick (2003), "shame/performativity may get us a lot further with the cluster of phenomena generally called "camp" than the notion of parody will, and more too than will any opposition between 'depth' and 'surface'" (p.64).[87] Camp (and disidentification for these purposes), like shame, is not only about repudiating and dismissing, but also about positive attachments. While shame emerges as a result of a restraint and/or frustration of curiosity and interest, camp stages the degrading claims because they hold some importance beyond everything that is transformed and mocked. It is because Alaska's appearance (as indexed in her preoccupation with her makeup) does matter for her that Alaska camps about it.

Considering that, as Tomkins (1995) posited, vulnerability to shame depends on psychic *investment* (p. 159), then the dismissal of shame proposed by pride politics finds its way through a *dis*investment, a *dis*attachment from the source of pain by way of transcending it and presenting one's pride as a healed wound. As suggested by Elisabeth Landenson (2009), "[g]ay pride is pride at lack of shame", a refusal of feeling ashamed of supposedly shameful behaviors (p. 108). If Aguilera dismisses her aggressor's claims and takes distance from them after having "surrendered" to them in a first moment, Alaska transforms Mathu's claims (with camp) and transforms Mathu's body (with the colorful powder): in the process of melodramatizing shame she positions the artificiality of the imperative of beauty alongside that of the imperative of pride.

Ongina parodies gay pride's injunction of liberal sovereignty by deploying shame in all its 'undignified' dependency on the love of the other. In all her irony, to sing "no matter what they say" while feeling ashamed comes to mean that in fact it *does* matter what "they" say. As the song plays "don't you bring me down today", Ongina falls to the ground - instead of claiming to not being depressed or having her power taken away, Ongina seems to counter-intuitively ask to be brought down so that out of the metamorphosis her self undergoes when shamed a "we" may emerge, bonded by a depressive love that acknowledges failures and the shame that often follows from them.

Shame can destabilize social norms not by actively refusing and fighting their binding power; instead, it is by pushing these norms to their limits and acknowledging their influence over

[86] Although this discussion is not in the scope of this project, I understand the unified self as a mythical masculinist ideal that recognizes their own image in the mirror as congruent to itself. It is only through not fully recognizing oneself in the reflection, through internalizing this difference - between one's experience of oneself and the image of oneself that is returned by the Other - that an "I" comes into being.

[87] Sedgwick in this passage is countering (1) Judith Butler's understanding of camp as (self-)parody, that is, as a hyperbolic imitation, albeit transformative, of femininity; and (2) the understanding I have referred to on chapter two that campy queens are actually pathetic and sad "underneath" their joyful and extravagant stage personas.

us that their exclusionary assumptions might be exposed. Disidentification is a powerful tool to do so because it takes away the literality of injunctions, that is, the severity of harsh impositions, while retaining an interest on them. When shame is disidentified about its consuming and paralyzing effects are turned into melodrama and humor. As Ongina falls to the ground in the last minute of the act she "scratches" her left arm with the lipstick, starting from the wrist, in what may be interpreted as a suicidal gesture (Figure 42) - or, better, the performance of a public suicide that is at once an expression of negativity towards the world and a folding of the body into itself. Interestingly, shame is added only after this ambivalent movement - both downwards and upwards, infused with both death and life, which appropriately embodies the double movement of shame as described by Sedgwick (2003): "towards painful individuation, towards uncontrollable relationality" (p. 37).

Figure 42

In fact, it is her overperformance, her excess of feeling that in a way disrupts the theatricality, the "make-believe" of the act, and makes us feel ashamed *for her:* because she gives *too much* of herself on the performance, we feel bad for her agony, for the realness of her act, and even guilty for the distress caused by our very presence there[88]. Instead of performing a moderate and contained version of herself, Ongina is unashamedly sentimental and theatrical to the point her performance disturbs and provokes the audience to rethink their responsibility towards her.

[88] It is because one is seen in such a deplorable state of shame that one becomes even more ashamed (of one's shame) - like in uncontrollable blushing.

Probyn (2005) asserts that "unlike empathy, shame does not permit any automatic sharing of commonality; rather, it poses deep limits to communication." (p. 105)[89]. Considering that "commonality" and "communication" are foreclosed by shame I suggest that shame holds a utopian potential of affecting and engendering a queer transformation on the beholder precisely when shame is not understood to request identification. Instead of being the "good" spectator, who is willing to find meaningful life-changing from experiencing the other's shame, I outline here a reparative mode of depressive *witnessing* the performance of shame. Like the queer communities outlined in the previous two chapters, the queer bondings engendered by the performance of shame are based not on commonality, similarity, and familiarity but on difference, alterity, and unknowability, as I will elaborate in the remainder of this chapter.

Shame can also be deployed, as suggested by Halperin and Traub (2009), to form "a queer politics that is less totalizing and tyrannical (…)". Instead of the effacement of distinct subjectivities into the common denominator of pride, "such politics would self-consciously embrace a multiplicity of lesbian-gay-queer emotions, impulses, and political gestures" (p. 31). In the same line, Tomkins (1995) affirms that "[i]f shame is dependent on barriers to excitement and enjoyment, then the pluralism of desires must be matched by a pluralism of shame (…) one man's [sic] shame can always be another man's fulfillment, satiety, or indifference" (p. 149).

Pride in turn does not allow such disparity but requires everyone around to share it. The proud subject demands a confirming echo as to eliminate the continuous threat shame poses since shame is inescapable and the process of priding is always incomplete (after all, the conditions of love are never completely explicit and self-doubt can anytime overcome the sense of self-esteem). Besides, the (individuating) traces of shame are long-lasting and cannot be eradicated with a change of values or conscience. We may affirm then that pride is paranoid because it is fragile (that is, susceptible to giving way to shame), which leads to its constitutive normativity - pride communities require each of its members to eliminate their shame so as to not contaminate those who had already overcame it.

With this in mind, Ongina incites us to question the limits of multicultural inclusiveness - are we willing to bond with a subject like her without condescension, without allocating the ashamed into the position of powerless victims? Can we reassess our own vulnerability to shame, acknowledge its differential sources, and build find a new connection that puts our own "face" at

[89] I am aware however that the collective embrace of shame solidify identities and boundaries once sharing shame, according to Tomkins (1995), is "a prime instrument for strengthening the sense of mutuality and community" (p. 156).

stake, allowing to be "touched" by the subject we are gazing? Can we reparent Ongina like James did with his younger self - and love her with all her flaws and insecurities? Can we not be ashamed of a drag queen that is not proud of herself, but relate to her in all her complexity and ambiguity? And can this reading experience bring a reparenting of ourselves, a self-love that performs reparation within the self (and embraces moments of shame, susceptibility as part of whom we are)?

According to Crimp (2009), alterity is maintained in the act of watching shame being represented:

> In taking on the shame, I do not share in the other's identity. I simply adopt the other's vulnerability to being shamed. In this operation, most important the other's difference is preserved; it is not claimed as my own. In taking on or taking up his or her shame, I am not attempting to vanquish his or her otherness. I put myself in the place of the other only insofar as I recognize that I too am prone to shame. (p. 71)

Ongina's shame does not follow from being humiliated by someone in a privileged position but instead emerges in reaction to the ugliness she inflicts upon herself.[90] Indeed, it is precisely because the aggressor is not represented that the performance resists to position Ongina as the victim, the recipient of someone else's hate or intolerance. By way of becoming one's own aggressor, Ongina's act does not assume an accusatory and contentious tone but invites the audience to consider, be affected by, and react to her disclosure of dependency. Also, since no aggressor is represented, anyone can potentially occupy that role, which leads to a collective sense of guilt on the audience that might stimulate the reassessment of one's position towards Ongina.

One possibility is that the audience identify with Ongina, share in her affect, unite with her in humiliation. Tomkins (1995) affirms that "[t]he human being is capable through empathy and identification of living through others and therefore of being shamed by what happens to others." (p. 159). However, feeling ashamed *for* the other entail a projection of one's own sense of what counts as a shameful failure: as Tomkins affirmed, "[o]ne may feel shame because the other feels shame, but also under circumstances in which the self would feel shame, even if the other does not" (p. 160).

However, the ethics of reception proposed in this chapter departs from the acknowledgment that Ongina is ashamed and we are not; that there are other ways through which to exert our responsibility towards that vulnerable subject who exposes her positive attachment to us than

[90] Another interpretation for Ongina's source of shame is that she is losing control over other's impressions on her: if makeup is worn to manipulate the face so as to elicit a certain desired reaction from others (i.e. admiration), then wearing excessive lipstick comes to signal a lack of control - not over oneself but over the other's vision of oneself.

joining her in their agony: their desires are other and ungraspable by definition, and for that such affective reflection is doomed to become an imposition of one's own sense of shame onto the other's. Taking up from last chapter's discussion, communities of shame do not entail a consumptive identification but a testimonial witnessing of the other's shame that recognize and values its differences in source, modulation and presentation. In order to define Henry James' relation to his younger self Sedgwick uses the terms "absorption" and "love" (in contrast to "merging" and "integration"): that is, a relation that does not seek unity in a tension-free synthesis, but a troubled love that moves and welcomes the other's shameful acts as a constitutive part of themselves.

Ongina's shame invites a closer look as it makes the audience stand and come to the stage to look at her, and the recorder of the video I analyze to do an extreme close-up on her face (Figure 43). Instead of evoking a paternalistic gaze her performance of shame indexes a desire of being seen and a - it is not that she wants her problems to be solved, her failures to vanish, but that we love and notice her as she is.

Figure 43

Alaska's camping of shame intertwines with serious scenes of contact, skin touching, and paint. While allowing to be touched and closely examined, she asks: "Do you love me anyway?" Witnessing her performance of shame may elicit a caring reaction towards her, a care that does not consume the other not simplifies it but is based on a depressive love that transforms both its object and ourselves (Figure 44). If we consider this song's line sentence seriously, and if we also open ourselves to being affected and "touched", we might find a community in this gap, a queer belonging in *the unevenness of our relationship.*

Figure 44

Performing reparation transfigures its object in a way that enables love, but a love towards a new subject altogether, a referent that is performatively brought together into a "whole" that was never there in the first place. In fact, reparation - and for this matter disidentification too - produces the object it claims to be amending. For that, a reparative reading of Ongina's performance of shame transforms her very identity in the act of loving it, which leads to the erasure of the need to fix and maintain a coherent sense of self so as to preserve the other's love.

The shaving Alaska is repulsive in her self-contempt: she embodies everything we do not want to be as members of an oppressed "class", making it hard to identify with her. However, like James with his young ashamed self, we can find a way of loving her in all her weakness and susceptibility. Unlike romantic love, which is exclusive and totalizing, the love put forward by Sedgwick does not intend on holding its object to oneself or preserving it but departs form and enjoys the very distance from its object.[91] As Sally Munt (2008) affirms, "[s]hame is an emotion that is particularly attaching, it is gluey, with a revolving cycle of separation-attachment-disattachment." (p. 24)

For Muñoz (1999), disidentification shares with melancholia a refusal of letting go of its object, despite how far of reach or flawed it might be. (p. 12) Both processes comprise a revitalization of the object by reworking - not through a schematic intentionality - its "problematic" parts into a possible site of (dis)identification. Reparation, as a melancholic move towards loving the other by tying together the good and the bad, reworks shame into the present and lets go of both its intentionality and teleology. The gesture of expressing shame, as Ahmed (2004) asserted, may come to mean a vow of good intention: "our shame *means that we mean well"* (p. 109), regardless of any following action or any previous existing intention. Such is the double performativity of shame.

[91] While I am reticent of posing love as the solutions for political problems ("Love trumps hate"), I also think we can reconsider love itself reparatively, that is, considering its flaws and virtues coexist in one complex affect.

By the end of the previous chapter I have argued that the vulnerability of Alaska is contingent to the space of the performance and its resulting contacts. I develop further now the idea that negative/paranoid effects of dismantling the self and taking away its supremacy by affirming that the shame presented on both Ongina and Alaska's acts does not claim to be the expression of one's authentic self, but predicates itself on an identity that is provisional - which Sedgwick defines as "anti-essentialist", "to-be-constituted" and Muñoz calls a "disidentity" (p. 164). Sedgwick's interest in the affect of shame derives from the fact that shame engenders an identity that is "already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition." (p.64). That is, by "generating and legitimating" a notion of identity that emerges in and through the performance of shame, this affect does not claim identity as an essence (with a truth that can be discovered) but embraces the vital role other's perceptions have on an identity that does not require to remain the same but is open to gaps in interpretation. As such, shame provides a way of destitution of the originality and primacy of selfhood that is comparable to camp, which also insists on theatricality and performativity, while retaining identity's psychic importance. Following this line of thought, David Caron (2009) posits that queer communities not only leave space for heterogeneity but "are also constituted by people who, in a sense, are not even similar to themselves and who embrace that disconnectedness from an unknowable self" (p. 127). In deploying shame Ongina's performance resists the supremacy of the self since, as noted by Halperin & Traub (2009), "shame can function productively as a solvent of identities" (p. 15). In fact, shame entails a dual movement towards the self's constitution and disarrangement, towards an entrapment in the crudity of existence and a thrust into the unknown of change: as asserted by Hanson (2009), "shame defies me, defines me, overwhelms me" (p. 134). Ongina present a sense of self that is in-the-making, always provisional and incomplete because constitutively ashamed: her head-piece falls, her appearance changes drastically… Likewise, the shaved head for Alaska stands in for the mutation the self undergoes during shame's appeal to the love of the other, a lack that is produced as it is perfumed and signals an openness to the care of the other (and a manifestation of her "face").

In coming back by the end of the video clip to the same dark corner where she started Aguilera represents pride as an event with the duration of a song, a psychological state of mind with a transformational potential for one's identity[92]. Thus, pride is as unstable and transient an affect than shame: pride is also performative (in both its senses: an affect that is experienced by way of its exposure; and a theatrical performance with an audience). Their acts hold the potential of bringing about a queer community that is as much about giving as it is about forgetting:

[92] A sunflower that is presented willow in the beginning of the videoclip appears by the end invigorated and…beautiful, which I read as representing the change happened in Aguilera's internal psychic world.

ephemeral and circumstantial to the space of the performance, these community bonds are generous in that they propose a love that does not demand reciprocity. Such love can only be nurtured momentarily, such as the depressive position, however psychically mature and stable one might be. In this regard, Warner (2000) affirms that a pride-less generosity and camaraderie is made possible once sharing abjection rather than dignity and respectability becomes the "entry pass". That is, he suggests that queer communities based on *sex* and its constitutive indignity (in opposition to "respectable gay sexual identity") are inclusive and non-hierarchical because do not require its members to live up to "community standards" (p. 34).[93]

To sum up: both pride and shame are performatic, contagious and hold a self-replicative potential, but pride is (more) self-referential and conservative; Aguilera's move in her video clip, informed by a multiculturalist rhetoric of "everyone is beautiful", echoes the way Halperin (2012) describes traditional gay male culture: "seeks less to change the world than to resist its inflictions (even at the cost of appearing reactionary, rather than progressive)", while it "affords such an important emotional and political resource" (p. 220). In turn, shame, besides promoting individuation, entails a (painful and unsustainable) feeling of not-enough-ness that may engender transformative and touching encounters. If considered depressively, the ashamed other may be loved in its singularity and not copied, incorporated, or pitied.

In this chapter I have argued that by inhabiting the unsustainable space of shame on stage Ongina and Alaska hint at the theatrical status of shame, contesting the visibility binary with which multiculturalism operates. Then, considering shame as a manifestation of positive attachments as proposed by Tomkins, I have suggested that the paradoxical expression of shame on the face and the turning away of the face invites a closer look. Furthermore, I have outlined how Ongina suggests an alternative ethics that allows for multiple experiences of shame and is based on a depressive love that, for entailing provisional identities, does not request its object to remain the same but indulges in risky and transformational encounters.

[93] Such a community entails an acknowledgement of heterogeneous modes of seeking pleasure, performing sex, and relating to oneself.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that drag holds a critical potential for exposing and denouncing not only hegemonic discourses but also the normative and exclusionary logics that informs counter-discourses. After all, the minoritarian's survival might require disidentifying not only with hegemonic violent situations but also with exclusionary anti-discourses since minoritarian communities also promote their own exclusions and violences, which can be rendered visible through the gay sensibility of camp, which for Halperin (2012) "is designed to *puncture* the romantic appeal of *beauty*, to *mock* the *seriousness* with which you might be tempted to endow your own emotions, especially your feelings of love and desire, and to *deconstruct* the kind of *authenticity* with which you might be tempted to invest them" (p. 288, emphasis mine). Moreover, in reading Ongina and Alaska reparatively and being attentive to the queer utopias they engender in their performances, I have developed and imagined queer communitarian bondings that are inconstant and inclusive.

In the first chapter, I have argued that the toleration of failure is constitutive of the biopolitical process of granting privilege and that the projection of failure constitutes the abject while blaming it for its own exclusion. Then, I have showed how multiculturalism praises failures as alternative successes with the affirmation of diversity. Following, I considered the negative effects of disidentifying with failure: first, the social critique to meritocracy, and second, how disidentification, as a survivalist strategy, takes away the severity of underachievement. Finally, I have discussed that constituting ethical attachments based on failure through a reparative notion of disidentification entails attachments that are based on ever-changing and plural differences - and for that queer the the notion of community.

In the second chapter, I have shown how Alaska's performance exposes the shortcomings of identificatory empathy and suggests a reconfigured notion of vulnerability that entails an openness to transformative encounters with otherness and uncertainty. Moreover, I have explored the effects of Alaska's camping about RuPaul's Drag Race mobilization of vulnerability as authenticity, which incites a kind of relationality that safeguards selfhood and encourages a distanced look by the audience. Finally, based on Shildrick's reading of Levinas, I have imagined an ethics of risk in which the ungraspability of Otherness is embraced through a testimonial witnessing of the vulnerable other.

In the last chapter, I have argued that reclaiming shame and considering its performativity questions and disrupts the binaries of pride/shame, visibility/invisibility of the repressive

hypothesis that informs multiculturalism. Based on Sedgwick's discussion on the queer performativity of shame, I show how expressing shame paradoxically encourages approximation in the moment of evading being seen since the gesture of turning the face away signals that the other's gaze matters - and attributes importance to that by way of avoiding it. Then, I have considered shame's queer utopian potential of constituting community through a depressive love that, through reparation, embraces the provisionality of identity and, by extension, the attachments that follow.

As I have shown in the first part of each chapter the biopolitical projection of failure, vulnerability, and shame onto the abject is not "simply" linguistic but a discursive practice that brings into being the very materiality of what is being referred to. Through an exclusionary process that relies on repetition, abject bodies are gendered, racialized, and also failed, vulnerabilized, and shamed (even though I recognize these concepts occupy different levels of analysis). Nevertheless, the three concepts overlap and constitute each other: both vulnerability and shame can come to mean failure, that is, an underachievement on the eyes of the multicultural mandate to self-empowerment and liberal autonomy; both failure and shame can be articulated as a sign of the self's vulnerability (as impressibility), its openness to that which overwhelms and destabilizes one's identity; and both ugliness and vulnerability can elicit shame when taken as that which needs to be transformed or let go in order to retain the love of the other.

Future studies should look closer to the affect of interest-startle in relationship with disidentification - what is the nature of this attachment and what exactly does it mean that the subjugated subject remains attached to the source of its subjugation? Considering that Tomkins (1995) affirms that "interest is a support of the necessary and the possible" (p. 77); we may say that sustained interest is not merely an affect that seeks subsistence and survival in providing information about the "necessary", but it may take us elsewhere, to the not-yet-here of future and "possible" attachments.

Ongina does not experience her (self-inflicted) failure as the gay pride discourse instructs her to experience, but inhabits the very space of failure repudiated by pride instead. In so doing she provides a critique of the shortcomings of communities that are based on sharing common traits or affects in that only those who hold the "membership card" are deemed worthy of ethical consideration. To counter such model of community, I have delineated alternative ethics that are less exclusionary because based on negative notions - failure, vulnerability, and shame.

Constituting community in failure/vulnerability/shame also has its shortcoming and promotes its own exclusions. As I have argued, these communities are marked by ephemerality - like sustaining a reparative position is psychically unattainable, these queer communities are

unsustainable time-wise, but with long-lasting effects, among which the dissolution of identity boundaries. I hope that in this thesis I conveyed the idea that experiences of being-in-community may be radically transformative of the self and queer the very arbitrary divide between individual-community. Moreover, these performances are experienced differently by people who are part of the gay subculture, and thus understand the references. Camp, as a form of irony, has been criticized by Muñoz, Bruce la Bruce, David Halperin[94], and Catherine Silverstone, among others, for providing a somewhat exclusionary space in which only the initiated "get" the jokes and share secret codes. Precisely what enables the sense of belonging for some is what impedes others of sharing it.

It is also important to notice that Ongina and Alaska profit from spectacularizing (their) failure, vulnerability, and shame, but this does not make their acts less subversive - just differently so. Their profit-based mode of performance-making highlights how political resistance can be found even in commercialized and capitalized practices.

It also would have been pertinent to explore further the differences in genre and style between the two performances - the more amateur Ongina (in the performance itself and the way the video was recorded) and the better produced collaborative work of Alaska - so as to think of practical strategies with which to put forward the alternatives imagined sketched here. In this line, further studies should explore how the three major concepts operated in this thesis are mobilized in straight and lesbian camp, and with which consequences.

Finally, I hope this thesis have shown that that even short and funny acts by popular drag queens can be politically subversive and incite ethical questions; that alternative queer horizons are worth imagining; and that utopia is an ambivalent place where beauty and ugliness, safety and risk, and love and hate coexist.

[94] For instance, Halperin (2012) describes the communal aspect of camp (as a mode of reading) as such: "Camp ascription therefore produces an effect precisely opposite to that of kitsch labeling. It marks the person making the judgment as an insider, as someone who is in the know, who is in on the secret of camp, already initiated into the circuits of shared perception and appreciation that set apart those who are able to discern camp and that create among such people a network of mutual recognition and complicity. (…) a basis for community" (p. 189).

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara, *Cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

Atterton, Peter, "Levinas and Our Moral Responsibility Toward Other Animals," *Inquiry* 54, no. 6 (2011): 633-649.

Auslander, Philip. "Against ontology: making distinctions between the live and the mediatized," *Performance Research* 2, no. 3 (1997): 50-55.

Bailes, Sara Jane, *Performance theatre and the poetics of failure*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Bartky, Sandra, "Shame and gender," in *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*, 83-98. Hove: Psychology Press, 1990.

Boler, Megan, "The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism's Gaze," *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997): 253–73.

Butler, Judith, *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. London: Routledge, 1993.

_____, "Imitation and gender insubordination," in *Women, knowledge, and reality: Explorations in feminist philosophy*, 371-387. New York: Routledge, 1996.

_____, "On Linguistic Vulnerability," in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 1-43. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

_____, *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

_____, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," in *Precarious Life,* 19-49. New York: Verso, 2006.

_____, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

_____, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance." Madrid, June, 2014. Available in http://www.institutofranklin.net/sites/default/files/files/Rethinking%20Vulnerability%20and%20Resistance%20Judith%20Butler.pdf

Carmichael, Peter A., "The sense of ugliness," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 30, no. 4 (1972): 495-498.

Caron, David, "Shame on Me, or The Naked Truth About Me and Marlene Dietrich," in *Gay shame*, edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 117-31. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Crimp, Douglas, "Mario Montez, For Shame" *Gay Shame,* edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 63-75. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Frerks, Georg, Warner, Jeroen and Weijs, Bart, "The Politics of Vulnerability and Resilience," *Ambiente & Sociedade* 14, no. 2 (2011): 105–22.

Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1988 (1976).

Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended," in *Lectures at the Collège De France 1975-1976*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Garvin, Lucius, "The problem of ugliness in art," The Philosophical Review 57, no. 4 (1948): 404-409.

Halberstam, Judith, "Shame and white gay masculinity." *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (2005): 219-233.

Halberstam, Judith, *The queer art of failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Halperin, David M. and Valerie Traub, "Beyond gay pride." *Gay shame* (edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 3-40. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Halperin, David M. *How to Be Gay*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2012.

Hanson, Ellis, "Teaching shame," in *Gay Shame,* edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 132-64. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

ten Have, Henk. "Respect for Human Vulnerability: The Emergence of a New Principle in Bioethics," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (2015): 395–408.

hooks, bell, "Choosing the margin as space of radical openness," in *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 203-209. New York: South End Press, 1989.

hooks, bell, "Moving Beyond Shame" In *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*, 93-104. Hove: Psychology Press, 2003.

Hubbs, Nadine, "On the Uses of Shame and Gifts of a Bloodmobile: Musings from a Musical Queer Apprenticeship" *Gay Shame* (edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 111-116. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Irigaray, Luce, *This sex which is not one*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Jones, Amelia. ""Presence" in absentia: Experiencing performance as documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11-18.

Katsouraki, Eve, "Violating Failures: Rosa Luxemburg's *Spartacus* Manifesto and Dada Berlin Anti-manifestation," *Somatechnics* 3, no. 1 (2013): 50–71

Kristeva, Julia, *Melanie Klein*. Vol. 2. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Landenson, Elisabeth, "Shame on Me" *Gay Shame,* edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 103-110. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009

Le Feuvre, Lisa (ed.) *Failure*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010.

Love, Heather, "Truth and consequences: On paranoid reading and reparative reading," *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2010): 235-241.

Marshall, David*,* "Rousseau and the State of Theater," in *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley,* 135-178. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Muñoz, José Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Vol. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. New York: NYU Press, 2009.

Newton, Esther, *Mother camp: Female impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Probyn, Elspeth, *Blush: Faces of shame*. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Sedgwick, Eve K.. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley: The University of California Publishers, 1990.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank, "Shame in the cybernetic fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins." *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (1995): 496-522.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, you Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity, 123-153. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel," in *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 35-65. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Shildrick, Margrit, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self. Theory, Culture & Society*. London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2002.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on camp," in *Camp: Queer aesthetics and the performing subject: A reader,* edited by Fabio Cleto, 53-65. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964.

Sturm, Jules, "Bodies we fail: productive embodiments of imperfection" PhD diss., Universities van Amsterdam, 2012.

Thornham, Sue: "Fixing into Images," in *Women, Feminism, and Media,* 24-54. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Tomkins, Silvan, "Shame-humiliation and contempt-disgust." *Shame and its sisters: A Silvan Tomkins reader* Duke University Press (1995): 133-78.

Tomkins, Silvan, "The varieties of shame and its magnification." *Exploring affect: The selected writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1995a): 397-410.

Tóth, Anna Zs., ""The Merry Murderers" - The Farcical (Re)Figuration of the Femme Fatale in Maurine Watkin's Chicago (1927) and its various adaptations." PhD diss., University of Szeged, 2010.

Tyler, Carole-Anne. "Boys will be girls: The politics of gay drag," in *Inside/out: Lesbian theories, gay theories*, 32-70. London: Routledge, 1991.

Warner, Michael. "Introduction," in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, vii-xxxi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993

Warner, Michael, *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Warner, Michael, "Pleasures and dangers of shame." *Gay shame,* edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, 283-296. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Werry, Margaret and O'Gorman, Róisín, "The Anatomy of Failure: An Inventory," *Performance Research* 17, no. 1 (2012): 105-110.

Wolfe, Cary, "Before the Law: Animals in a Biopolitical Context," L*aw, Culture, and the Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2010): 8-23.

Appendix

Lyrics for the songs:

Beautiful - CHRISTINA AGUILERA

(Figures on pages 88 and 89)

(Don't look at me)
Everyday is so wonderful
Then suddenly
It's hard to breathe
Now and then I get insecure
From all the pain
I'm so ashamed

I am beautiful
No matter what they say
Words can't bring me down
I am beautiful
In every single way
Yes words can't bring me down
Oh no
So don't you bring me down today

To all your friends you're delirious
So consumed
In all your doom, ooh
Trying hard to fill the emptiness
The pieces gone
Left the puzzle undone
Ain't that the way it is

You're beautiful
No matter what they say
Words can't bring you down
Oh no
You're beautiful
In every single way
Yes words can't bring you down
Oh no
So don't you bring me down today

No matter what we do (no matter what we do)
No matter what we say (no matter what we say)
We're the song inside the tune (yeah, oh yeah)
Full of beautiful mistakes
And everywhere we go (and everywhere we go)
The sun will always shine (the sun will always, always, shine)
And tomorrow we might awake
On the other side

We're beautiful
No matter what they say
Yes words won't bring us down
Oh no
We are beautiful
In every single way
Yes words can't bring us down
Oh no
So don't you bring me down today
Oh, oh
Don't you bring me down today
Don't you bring me down, ooh
Today

Your Makeup Is Terrible - ALASKA THUNDERFUCK

Greetings, earthlings
My name is Alaska Thunderfuck 5000 from the planet Glamtron
What's yours?

Now, I've come a long way to be here tonight
So let's get our greetings and salutations outta the way right now, shall we?

Hieeee, oh!
I don't know about you, miss Kitty, but I feel so much yummier
Now, there's an issue that's recently come to my attention that we need to discuss right now
Is that okay with you, honey?

Are you ready?
You! Are you ready? (Okay)
(Uhum)
Are you ready? (7x)[95]

Your makeup is terrible (4x)
But I love you anyway

Terrible, terrible, terrible!
Your makeup is terrible, terrible, terrible! (2x)
Your makeup is terrible!
But I love you anyway

Now, I heard this is the best motherfucking club in all the land
Is that correct? (ahuh) uhum
Well, it better be because I never had no stunt shows or shenanigans at the doorway

Mr Doorman, what's that? You need my ID?
This face is my ID, motherfucker!

Now, I'm not the kind of bitch who's gonna go behind your back and talk shit on you
If I have an issue with you, I'll bring it right to your busted face
Now, let's discuss it right now, shall we? Alrightalrightalright

Are you ready? (ahuh)
You specifically! Are you ready? (Uh me? Oh, yeah, I totally am)
Are you ready? (7x)
Your makeup is terrible (3x)
But I love you anyway

Terrible, terrible, terrible!
Your makeup is terrible, terrible, terrible! (2x)
Your makeup is terrible!
But I love you anyway

Oh my gosh!
This is the really serious part of the song, do you hear that? (Oh, my God)
You see, there's something I have to confess

[95] This means the line is repeated seven times.

You and I have a lot more in common than I thought
And it's something I need to bring to your attention right now

Are you ready? (I think so) (oh, God)
Are you ready? That's better!
Are you ready? (7x)

My makeup is terrible!
My makeup is terrible! (No!)
My makeup is terrible! (why?)
My makeup is terrible!
Do you love me anyway? (Wow!)

Terrible, terrible, terrible!
My makeup is terrible, terrible, terrible!
Your makeup is terrible, terrible, terrible!
Our makeup is terrible!
But I love you anyway