

TOUCHING THE TEXTURE OF THE OTHER: THE SLIMY AND QUEER EMBODIMENT

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

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

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Vienna, Austria

2024

Abstract

From the contradictory materiality of viscosity as neither solid nor liquid, but as an ambiguous in-between, I interrogate the ways embodiment has been theorized as a solid body to latter open a speculative slippery ground to imagine a queer and slimy phenomenology. I firstly touch-read upon the phenomenological texts of Sartre and Bachelard as symptoms of an *ambiguphobic* thinking, where the viscous appears depicted either as an aberrant fluid or as a fascinating state of matter - yet needing to be controlled or handled. I argue that this aversion or deceiving fascination for the slimy as part of the hegemony that solidity holds on the conceptualizations of the body of the Western phenomenological thinking. Through a queer feminist critique I expose that this aversion for the slimy signifies as threat to the borders of the solid subject, is also part of a gendered dynamic of binary exclusion where touching the Texture of the Other becomes a disgusting act.

In the second part of the research I think-with the different properties of the viscous, such as its liminality, malleability and internal friction, as a playful trope to re-imagine corporeality, identity, and subjectivity from a queer perspective. As part of this speculation, I also touch upon performances, mostly focusing on the pieces *Gootopia* (2021) and *Gootopia: the Treatment* (2023) by Doris Uhlich, as sites of experimentation with other forms of (un)making and (un)doing the body. Here I imagine what a slimy body might be like, as a corporeality that thrives in encounter, vulnerability and difference, attempting to find ways towards a queer and viscous phenomenology.

Declaration

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.): 22,781 words
Entire manuscript: 24,511 words

Signed: _____ Nerea González

Acknowledgments

In the end, it has also been fun.

This has stretched so much over time that it carries the affection of many friends and lovers that have held me and inspired me in the past. To them, I say thank you.

But here my heart beats fast and full for Ipek, Gui and Jovita for cuddling me, feeding me, and making out of the delirium of these last weeks a place for radical love.

I am incredibly grateful to the precious friendship and deep support of Mars and Alina, whom which I have shared, in a dislocated time-line, the pains and pleasures of writing a thesis.

A big thank you as well for very dear people that have helped me through, each one in their own way: Eva, Ana, Ita, Veza, Vale, Flora, Koi, Mariama, Pinar, Jamila, Emilija, Irene, Sherin, Niño Niña, Arantza, Anna

This also goes to my family for bearing with me “never finishing this”. And to my cat-husband Eki, for being understanding enough of my monogamous and exclusive relationship with my computer over the last month.

Blessed be the Angels of Chaos and Destiny.

And thanks to Miss Rita Lin too, I would not have made it without you.

Paradoxically, my body feels solid after this. Now let’s get *gooey*.

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I. WRITING THE VISCOUS (FOR A SPECULATIVE SLIPPERY GROUND)

Gootopia. A first *affectimage*.

I am thinking about how to start this thesis. And while I write, wondering how I will do it, I am already doing it. I am thinking about its beginning. I don't think origin is the word. A spark, perhaps. A drip. That "something", ignited by the experience of *Gootopia* by Doris Uhlich¹. This performance is the start of this thesis. But, as many starting points, they sometimes can get buried. Perhaps that is too dramatic: But they get mixed, mingled, sometimes temporarily forgotten, becoming distant echoes, or else, they are shouting their presence, unavoidably coming back. How will I go back to this piece? I am wrapped in all the theories and thoughts that have accumulated in my head, computer, and desk since that experiential starting point, like a heavy blanket. I, now, after all this research-time, see different things in the piece than what I saw the first time. Is this the performance afterlife?

Is it possible to go back? To where? What is *that what* the performance is? It can't be only one thing, it is moving, it is alive. I don't think I can go *there* as in an immovable or static origin. In my memory, exercise of what I remember, there's now my imagination and my theoretical lucubrations. Innocent eyes don't exist. In each blinking, I have already gone elsewhere.

¹ *Gootopia*, choreographed by Doris Uhlich, premiered October 15, 2021, at Tanzquartier, Vienna. Concept development by Doris Uhlich and Boris Kopeinig, set design by Juliette Collas and Philomena Theuretzbacher, costumes by Zarah Brandl, sound by Boris Kopeinig, lighting by Phoenix (Andreas Hofer) and Gerald Pappenberger, featuring Pêdra Costa, Ann Muller, Andrius Mulokas, Emmanuel Obeya, Camilla Schielin, and Grete Smitaite. Performance duration: 1 hour 30 minutes, no intermission.

What will this writing be? It will first be traveling to somewhere else, to a somewhere else. To the time and space of the performance that will always be now, in the afterlife, an imaginary one. Or oneiric. Of diffuse characters, vivid sensations tingling the mind and the body only for seconds, ephemeral, disappearing briefly after having been felt, crawling back to the chaotic and sometimes voluntarily inaccessible library of somatic memories. That's how it feels to remember how I felt in and during the performance piece. The piece has certainly stayed with me, I look at it as if it were a now hardened crust in my skin, and I try to find out what was exactly that which stuck to me so far, so much. Liquid back then.

Now, we go. *There.*

I am, with many more, in the room. The space is dimly lit, slightly cold, and there are no specific sitting areas. One can freely wander around the wide space that the stage, demarcated only by subtle dams built out of irregular and low silicone protuberances, stuck to the floor. It will be just this thin barrier that will separate "us" from the performers and the slime, it will be just this fragile limit that will prevent an overflow. We are all wearing masks, it's the time of COVID, and we, without still knowing it, are about to get confined once again in Austria. We all come from a collectively shared experience of lockdown in its different forms. Strange how the simple act of coming together in non-assigned seats, able to move freely in space felt unfamiliar, like a sort of quotidian pleasure re-discovered, and then sensed more intensely through its previous absence.

In a moment of hyper hygiene, of the aseptic, the exchange of slime between bodies, between mouths, is regulated as well as signaled as a dangerous practice or a threatening happening. Suspicion sticks to the slime of a sneeze, on a lip, or a tongue, or even to what can remain of it in a hand. The fear of what potentially could be transmitted through it. But here, in *Gootopia*, we are all surrounded by massive quantities of slime. Liters and liters. And the naked bodies of the performers are not only directly exposed to it, but they *are-with-it*, they become

slimy with it. The space becomes gooey and even acoustically sticky as we hear the slime fall to the ground, stretching, bubbling, and echoing the voices of the performers that breath through it, that scream within it. The resonances of the material accompanying the vibrant techno-like hard beating soundscape by Boris Kopeinig.

The slime becomes a provocation to the spectator who is confronted with a substance and its excess. The inside/outside binary is troubled, as the ambiguous and uncanny consistency of what might be usually “inside” is here hyper-exposed and main performer-agent on stage. The light and pale yellowish appearance of it does not eliminate the organic referent of slime, but rather showcases it exposes it. This slime doesn’t take you elsewhere, to the realm of sci-fi, the alien, to a fantastical world, or to a big Other. In Gootopia, the slime is corporeal, as if secreted from a body. It is organic, it is here, it is yours and mine and ours, is in us, in our bodies. What should be in is out. Out right here.

For a span of two hours, the performers, individually and collectively, interact, play, dance with slime. The space becomes a wet and slippery laboratory in which slime is not only the material or the object being dealt with, but also a performer and a subject acting in the piece. A becoming-with between performer/human and slime. Their delicate_violent_curious_silent_noisy_tentative_firm interactions take the form of ephemeral dripping sculptures and sliding alliances in which the boundaries of bodies are blurred within a viscous oscillation between the form and formless. Tangible and sensual, as in visible, hearable, touchable, smellable, this movement seemed to never set into a final shape or form. A constant impermanence, an ever-changing gooey world.

The materiality of viscosity and slime

Viscosity

The viscous is an in-between. The viscous stretches, trembles, shakes, sticks, oozes, expands and contracts. It coagulates, drips in a slow-motion flow, glues, re-generates its shapeless form, re-absorbing and welcoming back what was thought to be broken and divided. It remembers, too. It enwraps, absorbs, slides and glides, and sneaks through cracks. The viscous fascinates, repulses, disgusts, it turns you on, sparks curiosity and playfulness. It makes you gag, maybe it makes you laugh, or, even better, makes you giggle as it wobbles. The viscous can be nostalgic of childhood, the viscous can be infectious and frightening, the viscous can be lascivious, but also comforting.

The viscous is sort of everywhere. Snorts are viscous, and so are menstrual blood clots, pus, the sap of trees, anti-climbing painting, lubricant, saliva, snail slime, toy slime, body fat, gelatin and jelly, the collagen in bones, glue, dough, silicone, honey, molasses. Apparently, the bodies of the cats, with their shrinking and expanding property, are viscous too.² These, to name just a few, form a potentially never-finishable list of things that *are* viscous.

In its physical definition, viscosity is the quality or the state of being thick, sticky, and semi-fluid in a substance due to internal friction. This resistance creates a troubled flow, an opposition of a uniform flux. As a property of a fluid substance, viscosity is a measure of this internal resistance to motion or deformation. As a liminal consistency, viscosity exists in the betweenness of solid and liquid. “Describing the ‘viscosity’ of a substance”, writes Wagner, “indexes the strength at which it maintains a form, movement, and appearance as a single coherent entity, and that despite the fact that it is composed of many instances of its own

² Susanne Wedlich, *Slime: A Natural History* (Melville House, 2023).

molecules, which could potentially break away and become independent of one another or allow other molecular substances to intermingle with them”.³

But there are also things that are “not exactly viscous” but that *feel* viscous. As Sartre writes, “a handshake, a smile can *be* viscous”.⁴ That is, the perception or the lived or phenomenological experience of a gesture, an encounter, a situation, a touch, an emotion, can be felt as if being of a viscous consistency. In times of depression or sadness, time might become sticky, as in thick and heavy, events occurring on it as slowly sinking, undifferentiated, in a turbid blob. With anxiety, social spaces can become dense and tacky, suffocating. Here, the viscous is frightening and disgusting. During trance-like states, for example, under the influence of psychedelics or other drugs, the viscous can feel like a pleasurable continuity between oneself and the rest of the world, being softly touched and tenderly wrapped by everything around, as in a semi-fluid silk. Time liquefies, but still, slowly, separations fade, bodies become mushy and mellow.

In my research, I think-with the viscous as a material figure to think embodiment along texture and consistencies. The different properties of the viscous make it an edgy, rebel, slippery and playful trope to re-imagine corporeality, identity, and subjectivity from a queer perspective. Defined by its liminality (nor-solid-nor-liquid), viscosity invites to think about, with and through ambiguity as a place/space to be — and get comfy at — rather than as a merely transitional state that should be overcome or dissolved into one pole or the other. That is, it is a material figure that allows to think and imagine a stirring and blurring of binaries from its very in-between. Its defining opposition to flow and resistance to change of form caused by an internal friction, brings into the ontological and phenomenological narratives on body the play

³ Lauren B. Wagner, “Viscosity,” *New Materialism Almanac*, 2018, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/v/viscosity.html> (accessed August 26

⁴Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2003), 611.

of forces — and its effects and intensities — as a central element. That is, it draws to think bodies and affects through their relationship of stronger or softer tensions, resistances, and lubricated frictions rather than through the unbounded quality of the water or the stable and fixed state of solidity. Most importantly, the plastic, elastic and malleable properties of the viscous take place within this molecular game of resistances in which the capacity of radical shapeshifting happens inherently adhered to the frictions that constitute it. In this kinetic or dynamic relationality, the viscous materializes the tensions between homogeneity and heterogeneity.

The viscous is not adhered to a specific substance. Perhaps, for this reason it can seem, at first glance, a more abstract concept. For instance, slime, as the materialization and, one could say, concretization of the viscous, is the main form of viscosity I engage with in this research. In my imaginary, slime brings me closer to a more organic component – that being animal, human, or any other or in-between living organisms. With slime, the body as a referent is made explicit. However, as it usually happens with the viscous – and it will often happen in the process of writing this thesis, pleurably surprising me – distinctions and categorizations become slippery. In the most exhaustive piece of academic literature on the matter until the date, Freddie Mason writes:

the viscous is an impossible state of matter, a fantasy, a fancy, one that extrudes itself from and attaches itself, at various moments, to reality. There is an unstable distinction between “slime” on the one hand, and the “viscous” on the other. Where the viscous doesn’t exist as anything, “slime” does, but only slightly. Slime is the viscous edging into existence. Still a fantasy, still a fantastical matter, but unlike the viscous, it can be pointed to as an object in the world, in toy shops and in B-movies. But it is held in a state of retreat into the imaginary, stuff slipping into dream. Both the viscous and slime are dubious states of matter that dissolve eagerly into an operation of thought, a

way of being and of feeling.⁵

Writing the viscous and working the slime becomes messy and slippery. As a material in-betweenness, overflowing the dichotomic, dualist and binary modes of thinking, describing and being, viscosity can be understood as a figure of escaping fixed categorizations.

Slime.

When thinking about something viscous, slime is most likely the first example coming to mind. Perhaps the slime of a snail or a slug, of their bodies, of their traces. Perhaps the one in sci-fi and B movies, something alien, dark and thick, or something toxic, blobby, neon green. In a nostalgic of childhood mind-move, there is also the tacky version of it as a toy that shrinks, and even farts. Slime can certainly be this “funny thing”, or, in its Instagram trend version, an ASMR producing, calming, and beautiful texture. However, usually, in the collective imaginary, slime appears attached to what is disgusting, to something that makes the face go “ugh”, frequently used to exemplify something repulsive. For instance, “slime” is defined as “an unpleasantly thick and slippery liquid substance” (Oxford Dictionaries)⁶, a “smooth, sticky, liquid substance usually considered unpleasant” (Cambridge Dictionary)⁷. One can also *be* slime, which would mean to be “a morally repulsive or odious person” (Merriam Webster Dictionary).⁸

⁵ Freddie Mason, *The Viscous: Slime, Stickiness, Fondling, Mixtures* (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2020), 23–34.

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “slime,” accessed September 1st, 2024, <https://www.oed.com/>

⁷ Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “slime,” accessed September 1st, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slime>.

⁸ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “slime,” accessed September 1st, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/slime>.

There is something of the concretization of the viscous in slime that makes, out of the physical qualities that compose the viscous, something disgusting. How does the material state of being thick, semi-fluid, and sticky become repulsive? How does, then, the disgusting slime become a harmless funny toy? Or a pleasurable substance to dive our fingers into? When “edged into existence”⁹ the slimy seems to become a container of many moral connotations, or, to be more precise, denotations. Slime then appears as a material symbol for the disgraceful, the unpleasant, the dangerous, the sick, the negative... My own speculation is that this transformation into the abhorrent is connected to the closeness between slime and a living body that exudes, oozes, drips to, eventually, decompose losing any semblance of boundaries. A corporeality that, in most cases, disgusts or frightens. Certainly, slime can be a potential threat to health, as a possible carrier of viruses. But slime can also be a good sign of the presence of life in an organism, a necessary lubricant, a healthy libido... Rather, could this feeling of threat come from slime’s high potential to affect other bodies as a transporter of molecular intimacies of an individual or singular body that will then be exposed and released to the world of the Others? Slime, a “too much of a body” in a dry and aseptic world. is that what-is-out-but-should-be-in.

Indeed, slime, writes Susanne Wedlich, “is being forced out of our ultra-hygienic world. But that’s easier said than maintained: slime is essential to humans and all other organisms”.¹⁰ While the potential of slime to be a contaminating and infectious agent is a reason why we, as humans, might have developed a “protective disgust” from it, this explanation is reductionist and falls short. Disgust is also a culturally developed and socially sustained emotion. That is, we also grow to be disgusted with certain things depending on our context and our upbringing.

⁹ Mason, *The Viscous*, 24.

¹⁰ Wedlich, *Slime*, 2023, 35.

In face of the question why slime disgusts us, I don't wish to obtain answers of a scientific kind. What interests me is to open a speculative semi-solid ground to think about in which sense the revulsion of the viscous is also related to an aversion of the in-betweenness in both its material and existential aspects that also permeates western philosophical thinking. That is, in which sense the aversion to viscosity is related to an *ambiguphobic* thinking—that is, dualist or binary, categorical and normative, enclosed—and how this disgust appears to be gendered. The fear and disgust of the slimy as that what is in an in-between expose the implicit solid/liquid binary that prevails in the western philosophical thinking – as well as in our inherited conceptualizations, imaginations and languages we use to theorize identity and corporeality.

How is the viscous being written?

Writing the viscous is, evidently, a matter of reading the viscous too. How does then viscosity exist in the academic literature that will dampen this essay? *Gootopia*¹¹ (2021) was the starting and turning point that sparked my interest of researching and encountering viscosity as a philosophical concept within academical discourse. The in-betweenness of viscosity in the materiality of the slime used in the piece became extremely enigmatic for me. It signified an intense blurriness of boundaries, a defiant messiness. Given the COVID context of the time, where the discourses on protecting the body and immunology were a usual main content to be exposed to, I first looked to the slime through the biopolitical lens. Mainly focusing on the work of Roberto Esposito¹², I thought of viscosity as a quality to think of the existing stickiness of the limits Self/Other reflected in the Immunity/Community paradigm. That is, how the ideals of absolute protection – a Self-Immunity – were connected to ideals of dryness, solidity, and an enclosed body-nation.¹³

Here, what viscosity “was” and what viscosity’s material properties could mean for a philosophical analysis, remained mysterious. Viscosity, as a developed concept in academical texts, seemed to be anywhere. However, viscosity, concretely in its slimy form, seemed to be everywhere: growing interest for researching the intelligence of slime molds, scientific experiments to take advantage of the malleability of the material, the Instagram slime-making ASMR craze. Even with the past of time since 2021 – first contact with *Gootopia* – to the current 2024 – the moment I am finally siting down to write and finish this thesis - the slime-craze is still peaking. In the specific case of performances that slime and viscous materialities has also

¹¹ *Gootopia*, choreographed by Uhlich.

¹² Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

¹³ Emily Martin, “Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1990): 410–26.

become a very popular element to perform-with: Siegmund Zacharias on *Slime Dynamics*¹⁴ (2017), Tamara Alegre on *Fiebre*¹⁵ (2021), Joshua Serafin on *Void*¹⁶ (2023), Layton Lachman on *Infinity Kiss*¹⁷ (2024), Young Boy Dancing Group on *Locarno*¹⁸ (2024)... How exactly the waves of interest that draw a collectivity into certain materials, elements, theories and make them a “hot topic”, remains enigmatic – and is also not a question I seek to answer in these pages. Not knowing exactly why, we might all be talking about it. Like this, that initial anywhere became every-where.

One of the currents of thought that seemed to recently pick up theoretically on viscosity as a category to think-with was new materialism. Here I encountered Nancy Tuana’s¹⁹ and Arun Saldanha’s²⁰ work. Writing on the Katrina earthquake disaster and the relationships between the city and its infrastructure, the social and political body and nature as agents, Tuana focuses on the property of viscosity as a porous membrane as a companion to the agential realism that she proposes to think the deep interrelation between these bodies. On the other hand, in his ethnographic study of the Goa Trance scene in India, Saldanha’s viscosity will become a social category to study the coagulations and density of the white collectivities. While I don’t rely on them for my work in this research, their way of thinking through the material qualities of viscosity “stuck” with me and inspired me profoundly to think the slimy body not only through its liminal property, but also as a powerful as playful trope to establish deepen theoretical connections through coagulation, dynamism and kinetics, plasticity...

¹⁴ Zacharias, Siegmund. *Slime Dynamics*. Bickmann, 2017.

¹⁵ Alegre, Tamara. *Fiebre*. Vienna, 2021.

¹⁶ Serafin, Joshua. *Void*. Vienna, 2023.

¹⁷ Lachman, Layton. *Infinity Kiss*. Vienna, 2024.

¹⁸ Young Boy Dancing Group. *Locarno*. Vienna, 2024.

¹⁹ Nancy Tuana et al., “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 188.

²⁰ Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

Writing the viscous in the most exhaustive study on the matter to the date is Freddie Mason.²¹ In *The Viscous: Slime, Stickiness and Fondling Mixtures*, he delves into the phenomenological and ontological pathways opened by viscosity as a material state as well as an imaginative event too. I profoundly own my widening of perspective of the possibilities of the slimy as a figure of thought to Mason's delicious insistence on thinking through consistencies and textures to develop sensual and viscous imaginations. Following closely the viscous as a materiality – and not only as a category – Mason thinks on the ways existence and encounters between bodies can be imagined through this consistency.²² Although not the focus of the book, Mason also invites to question the predilection for the fluid present in contemporary and “progressive” political discourses.²³ In which ways can viscosity offer a way of accounting for tensions or obstacles that offer an exit of the statism and fixity of the solid while still not falling into an unbounded and untroubled fluidity?

His questioning of fluidity through the viscous made me aware of the importance of the qualities of resistance and friction of the viscous when thinking embodiment. As a follow up question to the one above, what would then being gender viscous mean – and a departure from gender-fluidity? These questions also orientate my speculative material imaginations on a slimy - queer - body as existing in constitutive friction as well as in constantly mutating consistencies – hardening, softening, liquefying, coagulating... However, Mason doesn't include a queer perspective in his analysis. Absent in Mason's text, the feminist critique became for me fundamental to understand the gendered-bias background of the ways in which viscosity has been theorized in phenomenological and ontological philosophical thinking. This became especially relevant when I close-read the lineage that Mason follows too on the matter: the writings on the viscous of Jean-Paul Sartre and Gaston Bachelard.

²¹ Mason, *The Viscous*.

²² Sticky relationality; or the weird moments being viscous (for Sara Ahmed these would be the queer moments)

²³ Mason, *The Viscous*, 101, 253.

Both Sartre and Bachelard turn to the viscous as a material for their phenomenological enquiries. In both of the authors, although through different means, viscosity is portrayed as intriguing consistency, nevertheless, highly problematic. On the now classic last passage of *Being and Nothingness*,²⁴ Sartre writes the contact with the viscous with fear and disgust that, as I will develop on the chapter II, is related to the fear of dissolution of the subject. That is, the revulsion is founded on the in-betweenness that contests the solid boundaries of the self. Sartre's position is one of rejection and turning away from the object, in a gesture of disgust. Accompanying Sartre but following a different motion, is Gaston Bachelard,²⁵ who appears not so much turning away but turning towards the viscous. However, as I argue, this fascinating and desiring attitude hides a fantasy of controlling the slimy (hand-ling it). In both cases, the position of disgust or control expresses a same need that makes a threat out of the viscous: maintaining a hierarchy and possessive relationship towards the "Other" as a condition for the "I" or the Self. Despite the different means, Sartre and Bachelard share the same wish to get rid of the viscous to, in ontological and phenomenological terms, get rid of the ambiguous.

Both Sartre and Bachelard have become the main lineage to follow when theorizing on the viscous. Specially Sartre's text, has found many resonances in the contemporary feminist thinking that I work with here: Mary Douglas,²⁶ Sara Ahmed,²⁷ Elizabeth Grosz²⁸ and Laura Tripaldi.²⁹ These resonances are usually linked to his reaction of disgust and, in the case of

²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.

²⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 2002); Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983).

²⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Grosz, "The Thing," in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2001).

²⁹ Laura Tripaldi, "Libidinal Rheology," *Plutonics: A Journal of Non-Standard Theory* XIII (March 2020): 70–78.

Ahmed and Grosz, to understand the reaction as deeply gendered, since Sartre understands feminine body as a slimy body. Comments on Bachelard are not so extended, perhaps for the unpopularity of his work in comparison to Sartre or, perhaps, because his “fascination” for the slimy can be deceiving. Even Mason has a positive reading on Bachelard as a playful relation with the viscous that I am not close to share in these pages. Perhaps because of the absence of the queer perspective in his analysis, the gendered dynamic of control that Bachelard puts into “play” is overlooked.

It was inevitable, for me, to not think through a queer feminist perspective these texts. Both Sara Ahmed – from affect theory – and Elizabeth Grosz - from philosophy of body – engage with Sartre and Bachelard from the emotion of disgust. Ahmed points out the relationship between disgust and a sensual closeness with the body that becomes a source of aversion. Then the disgust from the viscous might come from the fact of a body revealing to be extremely susceptible to close encounters. Similarly, Grosz reads the disgust felt by Sartre as a specific type of corporeality that thinks itself im-permeable and therefore threatened by the leakiness viscosity signifies.

What both Ahmed and Grosz expose is that the way Bachelard and Sartre write the viscous is not only misogynistic in their language and associations - as I will show in chapter II. Rather they point to the way in which these accounts on the viscous are gendered insofar as they are embedded in a dualist frame that pivots over the ideal of an absolute and autonomous subject and of a body as an enclosed entity – the traditional white male subject. That is, operating through a scheme where the Other stands in a devalued asymmetrical relationship.

Grosz points out to the existence of this solid/liquid binary in phenomenological theories to suggest a type of body that I have called hardened. As a preliminary framework to close-read Sartre’s and Bachelard’s text, I try to unpack the ways in which this type of solidified body becomes a hegemonic corporeality in western philosophical thinking, becoming exacerbated

under the paradigm of the Modern Reason. Here, I follow Denise Ferreira da Silva³⁰, Barbara Duden³¹ and Silvia Federici³² that, despite departing from different disciplines and discourses, share however a deep analysis of the ways the body becomes a solid, closed and fixed entity.

Even in the critiques of the solid/liquid binary as Grosz' the viscous still remained as transversal category. Lost and hiding in that in-between. Here, it was crucial to me to think closely with the viscous and not only around it. What I find exciting about thinking with the materiality of the viscous is its vandalistic potential to not create turbulences and stirrings of this textural binary, but to imagine what a slimy body would be like.

In imagining a slimy phenomenology, in chapter III, I set a slippery playground with texts where the viscous has not been explicitly written, proposing to touch-read them through it. As a des-stabilization of the transparency that comes with the need of making the body as graspable, I read the concept of opacity in Édouard Glissant³³ as a property of the viscous as evading fixation. I think spatially with Victoria Pérez Royo³⁴ in how the figure of *inclinación* provides a melting of the verticality of the hard structures of a solid body compromising the centrality of the "I".

In a similar sense, in *Queer Phenomenology* Ahmed talks about the straightening up of the bodies imposed by a sexual normativity which is however questioned by the queer body.³⁵ I read in viscous terms the corporeality proposed by Ahmed, that finds its way by being de-oriented and where this instability becomes constitutive of a body and identity in a constant process of (un)doing. That is, a positive reconceptualization of the ambiguity of the viscous

³⁰ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *La deuda impagable*, 1st ed. (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2023)

³¹ Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³² Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004).

³³ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

³⁴ Violeta Pérez Royo, *Cuerpos Fuera de Sí: Figuras de la Inclinación en las Protestas Sociales* (Córdoba: Ediciones DocumentA/Escénicas, 2022).

³⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

that under a solid paradigm constitutes a phobia. This shift requires as well to accommodate constant changes of a malleable body through the rheological perspective, as the one of Laura Tripaldi, that focuses on deformations and conceptualizes the body as a “convoluted surface”.³⁶

Within this ambiguity and softness, frictions – also constitutive of the viscous materiality – take place too. In this sense, I find my support on Erin Calhoun Davis’³⁷ critique of the limitations of thinking queer identity through the concept of fluidity, in order to offer a problematization of understanding a state or consistency as fixed – even if fixed in fluidity. That is, an understanding of the body as malleable and a shape-shifter.

³⁶ Tripaldi, “Libidinal Rheology,”.

³⁷ E. C. Davis, “Situating ‘FLUIDITY’: (Trans) Gender Identification and the Regulation of Gender Diversity,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 1 (2009): 97-130.

Sensual Theory

To write the viscous brings with it, inevitably, to touch it. With sticky fingers, adhered to the meanings that are revealed in the act of writing it. Here - and also there - reading the viscous becomes an intimate encounter with the texts, sensual in its tactility. As in the writings of Hélène Cixous, where the text is a body, a close-reading involves the fading of the distance of the gaze towards it. As in a myopic eye, trained in this closeness, the vision becomes tactile.³⁸ This eye over the lines of this texts is now palpating them like a hand, and this reading-touching unfolds a transformation of the text into *text-ure*. In this incarnated vision, the hand-eye wonders around the resonating surface of the *text-ure* which language involves a “liminal erotic play” between its consistencies³⁹ – solid/liquid, hard/soft and, of course, the viscous and slimy. The text is alive and, as Cixous writes,

the movement, the movement of the text, doesn't trace a straight line. I see it as an outpouring . . . which can appear in primitive or elementary texts as a fantasy of blood, of menstrual flow, etc., but which I prefer to see as vomiting, as "throwing up," "disgorging."⁴⁰

The texts then are moving and leaking and the hand, my hand too, becomes permeable to it in its desire of recognizing the Other in there. Touch-reading is a way of being in the text that involves then an abandonment of a hardened body, also part of the sensual way of writing rehearsed - at times with more or less failure or success - on this research. This abandonment required by closeness opens up the possibility of thinking-with or, as Sedwick puts it, “beside” the viscous rather than through it: “Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the

³⁸ Hélène Cixous, “Savoir,” in *Veils*, by Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1–16.

³⁹ Renu Bora, “Outing Texture,” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (1997), 95.

⁴⁰ Hélène Cixous and Annette Kuhn, “Castration or Decapitation?,” *Signs* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173505> (accessed September 23, 2010).

linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object”.⁴¹ Touch-reading is here then part of the invitation, that I extend, to think-with textures and consistencies the theories unfolded here.

When starting this thesis, H. told me – perhaps joking or not – that my methodology would be my intuition. This comment made me smile and has stayed with me as it already disclosed the mysterious and bodily journey of finding the ways for this slimy research. Reading with the body then means as well to honor these sensual impressions or affections and, following them, palpating, might as well be called a method by intuition.

Other methodologies that outflow the texts have been, during the years 2021-2023, my art practices with the viscous. In the realm of performance with *Slug_ts*,⁴² dancing with the contradictory consistency of Oobleck – cornstarch and water – that hardens when pressure is applied to it. Of installation, with *Finding Pleasure in Unarticulated Forms*.⁴³ And performative lectures as *Slimy Entanglements*⁴⁴ (2023) and *What is the consistency of the Normal?*⁴⁵.

Unknowingly, as I didn’t expect my attendance to it would turn to be my material and research obsession for years, *Gootopia*⁴⁶ became an extremely relevant of art-based research that later was accompanied by my participation in the workshop *Gootopians* (Impulstanz Festival, 2023, Vienna) as well as, for my extreme pleasure, with my participation in the

⁴¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press), 8.

⁴² Scherer, Aaron; González, Nerea. *Slug_ts*. Vienna, 2023.

⁴³ Landa, Irene; González, Nerea. *Finding Pleasure in Unarticulated Forms*. Vienna, 2023.

⁴⁴ *Performative Lectures as Slimy Entanglements*, part of the “Non-hegemonic Corpor(e)ality and Empowerment Workshop Series,” Central European University, Vienna, 2023.

⁴⁵ *What is the Consistency of the Normal?*, part of the “TRANSforming Research: Feminist, Experimental, and Arts-Based Practices,” Central European University, Vienna, 2023.

⁴⁶ *Gootopia*, choreographed by Uhlich.

performance *Gootopia: The Treatment*.⁴⁷ These, as performance and living art pieces, constitute crucial points of this theoretical research. Performances then become intimately entangled with the concepts, where conceptual tools are thought here, with Lucrecia Masson⁴⁸, as “can-openers whose utility is entirely part of the situation X that will make them indispensable, like something that can’t be thought without the things that they will open” (37)

Along with Victoria Pérez Royo, I think performances as “laboratories of transformation of corporealities”⁴⁹ where experimentations with other forms of (un)making and (un)doing the body happen. I then think about artistic practices as powerful sites that can make speculations spark, for other-kind of relationalities and embodiment forms than the hegemonic solid body. As Victoria⁵⁰ writes, the bodies in scene “are not only subjected and molded by the emotions that circulate between them, but also unfold mechanisms to relate with those emotions not as a passive material but as agential entities [...] the subject on that interaction also conforms the intensity of the flux of emotions both for itself as well as for the ones towards it redirects it”.⁵¹

In my writing, I try to not bend the performances I write about to the theories I dialogue with, but rather, entangle them and think with and besides them. Then, the narratives that I give of the performances don’t intend to constitute an analysis that could draw a faithful image - if that can even exist when writing performance. Neither gives a linear or complete account of the happenings, experiences and moments unfolded in them. Rather than analyzing them, I chose to think-with their *affectimages*, that have *stuck* with me until now. To combine the memory

⁴⁷ *Gootopia: The Treatment*, performed at Brut Nordwest, Vienna, 2023.

⁴⁸ Lucrecia Masson, “Echarse Con Vacas,” in *La Dimensión Material de Las Nubes* (Barcelona: Pluri Ediciones, 2024).

⁴⁹ Victoria Pérez Royo, *Cuerpos Fuera de Sí: Figuras de la Inclinación en las Protestas Sociales* (Córdoba, Argentina: DocumentA/Escénicas, 2022), 13. Translation from the Spanish is mine.

⁵⁰ During the text I will, given my personal relationship with both, refer to Victoria (Pérez Royo) and Doris (Uhlich) by their first names, as writing within the formality of the surnames establishes an uncanny distance between our bodies and voices.

⁵¹ Pérez Royo, *Cuerpos Fuera de Sí*, 20.

and affection – that is then, selective or narrowed – living in my body. Here, the performance outlives the moment where the piece ends, rebelling against ontologies as Peggy Phelan's that declare its death in that very instant.⁵² *Affectimages* are then part of the life of the performance that, not reproducing it, extend it in the text as the playful work of imagination. Precisely, an important exercise of this research is about making out of theory a place of imagination.⁵³ Reason why, in the third chapter i propose a more speculative approach that finds its slippery yet supporting ground on a variety of *affectimages* unfolded by *Gootopia* and *Gootopia: the Treatment*.

Lastly, an indispensable part of this sensual methodology has also been to enjoy writing the viscous and finding pleasure within it.

⁵² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁵²

⁵³ Masson, "Echase Con Vacas", 39.

II THE TEXTURE OF THE OTHER

The hegemony of the solid and the hardened body

The hardened body is configured through the solid/liquid binary, underlying and implicit – yet prevailing – in western imaginaries and philosophical thinking. Solidity is usually ascribed to reason, to the concept, to a strong sense of identity, the mind, the measurable and contained. On the other hand, liquidity has been traditionally ascribed to emotions, to unbounded or hard to control matter, to those which escapes, and the dreams. Far from casual, the set of characteristics attributed to the solid and the liquid mirrors the characteristics to which masculinity and femininity have been historically linked, making the solid/liquid binary an explicitly gendered dichotomy which doesn't stand in a symmetrical relationship, but rather in a strong axiological hierarchy. Furthermore, the Solid/Liquid division carries and resonates with the dualisms of Mind/Body, Transcendence/Immanence, Subject/World, Self/Other, Subject/Object, Culture/Nature, Man/Woman in which the latter is always subjected to the first, and conceived to be of a lower value.

As I will argue in Chapter II, through reading-touching, and thinking with consistencies, this is the textural binary that can be found between the lines of the texts of these authors. That is, the way Sartre and Bachelard deal with matter, or their material thinking, is inherited from a philosophical tradition in which the ambiguous and unformed, like the viscous, are thought of as being problematic, and, in that sense, the slime as disgusting and threatening.

Discussing the materiality of wax – that, ultimately, or in one of its stages, is viscous before solidifying into a fixed form – Didi-Huberman points out a philosophical tradition that is based on a polarity of matter/form, and matter/spirit. Stemming initially from Plato and Aristotle, this dualist perspective will be then picked up by the Cartesian and Kantian modern

traditions and further in time by the Freudian theory. Here, writes Didi-Huberman, “material would be, in the best philosophical tradition, ‘secondary’, ‘potential’ or even ‘indeterminate’. [...] At worst, material would be formlessness – an insurrection against *form* – at best, it would be an example of passivity, of subjection *to form*”.⁵⁴ That is, as an informed viscous material, wax – or in some examples, clay – in the work of these authors signifies the foundational distinction of this philosophical tradition between the primacy of the subject and the secondary matter. Functioning through what Didi-Huberman calls “a material fantasy set in motion for the long term”,⁵⁵ the viscosity of the wax – not yet slime, as it will later be the case in Sartre and Bachelard – functions as a paradigmatic material that, within the dualist frame of solidity/liquidity, problematizes the distinction between Subject/World, Mind/Matter, I/Other.

In a similar direction, examining the onto-epistemological roots of colonial and racial subjugation, Denise Ferreira da Silva⁵⁶ elaborates on how the western, modern, and post-enlightenment philosophies generate a specific cosmovision that shapes worlding and being/doing a body based on the principles of separability, determinability, and sequentiality. By these ordering principles, what is knowledgeable is reduced to what the mind can access in a clear and distinct way. “The early thinkers of natural philosophy (Galileo, 1564–1642, and Descartes, 1596–1650) and classical physics (Newton, 1643–1727) inherited the vision of Antiquity regarding matter, the notion that understands the body based on abstract concepts that would be present in thought, such as solidity, extension, weight, gravity, and movement in space and time.”⁵⁷ What does not fit the criteria of individuation, linearity, and quantity is, ultimately, unintelligible.

⁵⁴ Didi-Huberman, “The Order of Material,” 43.

⁵⁵ Didi-Huberman, “The Order of Material,” 43.

⁵⁶ Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *La Deuda Impagable* (Tinta Limón, 2023), 34.

⁵⁷ Ferreira da Silva, *La Deuda Impagable*, 32.

That is, the body “needs” to be fixed, quantifiable, graspable and transparent to be accessed and known. A body in motion, or with unclear boundaries, is not conceivable under this set of conditions. With a clear beginning and end, as an individual unity, the body is here devoid of difference.⁵⁸ Coming back to wax, by this Aristotelian-inherited rule of individuation, “matter must proffer that subtle quality of being neither too dry nor too liquid, neither too hard nor too soft”⁵⁹ – that is, viscous. At first glance, it might seem that, then, the viscous is thought of as an ideal form. However, it is only so in an instrumentalist way, with the objective of obtaining – by the human action – a specific form to set in. The viscous only serves the purpose of being given a form by reason, its plasticity serving the purpose of later being solidified and fixed, hardened, so it takes the ideal form – and a consistency that will endure. A subtle gesture of linguistic erasure of a negative prefix, but a deep semantic-material transformation; the shift from the un-form to form. In other words, the viscous here is a mere transitional state, contingent on solidity as its destiny, that, ultimately, constitutes its *raison d’être*.

The predilection for a solid or hardened body can also be traced in the work of Barbara Duden, a historian of medicine. By examining the records medical practitioners kept of ill women in the XVIII century, in *The Woman Beneath the Skin*,⁶⁰ Duden shows the sociogenesis of the modern body unfolding from the medical gaze of the time. She argues that this “dissecting gaze” generated a type of perception that saw the body as isolatable, individualized, private, turning it into “a new kind of discrete object”.⁶¹ Here, the body is perceived as simultaneously produced by the gaze, which is connected to the establishment of modern medicine, the institutionalization of administrative-bureaucratic powers⁶² over the body, and the emergence

⁵⁸ Ferreira da Silva, *La Deuda Impagable*, 39.

⁵⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, “The Order of Material: Plasticities, Malaises, Survivals,” in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Birnbaum and Caroline A. Jones (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 44.

⁶⁰ Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 4.

⁶² To further elaborate on the mechanisms of disciplining and subjugating the body: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). For a contemporary queer and trans

of capitalism. In this specific sense, Silvia Federici offers a brilliant analysis through a feminist Marxist perspective on how this modern corporeality was forged through the capitalist seizure of land (fencing and expropriation) and how the same laws were applied to the body, specifically to the bodies of women, depriving them of any independency, power or magic.⁶³ These show the strong link between configurations of the social body and territory and conceptions of the human/physical body.

What I want to highlight here is that the conception of the limits of the body is one of the major shifts from anterior somatic cosmologies that Duden points out. As an individual, discrete and quantifiable unity, the interior of the body is clearly differentiated from an exterior that, in turn, becomes threatening to its integrity and sovereignty. An immune body, a nation-state of flesh.⁶⁴

Here, the exchange between inside and outside becomes problematic, and the skin becomes a fleshy, yet hardened, wall of this modern somatic dichotomy, generating an “individual closed body”,⁶⁵ or is, following Silvia Federici, “fenced and seized”.⁶⁶ Duden indicates that, in this prior paradigm, “the skin does not appear as a material seal shutting the inside off from the outside”,⁶⁷ and that, even if a boundary, it was a fragile one “not meant to demarcate the body against the outside world. It was above all a surface on which the inside revealed itself”.⁶⁸ Duden points out that, with the solidification of the body into a clearly bordered body, ideas on flow between interior or exterior, or the lived experience of the body as “in flux”, were abandoned in favor of a more static body that had to be preserved.⁶⁹

perspective on the same matter: Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013).

⁶³ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomedia, 2004).

⁶⁴ See: Emily Martin, “Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1990): 410–26.

⁶⁵ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 16.

⁶⁶ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

⁶⁷ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 121.

⁶⁸ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 124.

⁶⁹ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 17.

Additionally, the problematization of the exchange between the inside and outside obscured the permeability and porosity of the body.

These considerations could easily be interpreted as tied only to what is understood as the physical or organic body. But, as Duden writes, “the power of words and of the contexts from which they arise reveals itself in the fact that we are unable to entertain conceptualizations different from those inherent in the words and their contexts”.⁷⁰ My body, our body, is historical, and our lived experience of it – or our imagination – are conditioned by the context they are inserted in. The material metaphors, and the ontological and epistemological schemes that order the cultural and social context the body exists in, are also its conditions of perception. My body, this flesh, these bones, this mind, this identity, and existence are mine. But at the same time, this body is a historical and political artifact.

Altogether, this western onto-epistemic regime sustains what I call the hegemony of the solid, where solidity is located on top of a hierarchy that hardens the body into a stable, graspable and closed entity. Solidity becomes a hegemonic consistency type, in the sense that it coagulates in a corporeality that is set as an ideal, and that obstructs the imaginations of alternative corporealities that exceed this dualist scheme. This is why the hegemony of the solid, with its absence of fluid imaginations of the body, and the problematization of its permeability, is connected to phenomenological and ontological theories where, as Judith Butler’s work has widely shown, vulnerability and interdependence are negated.⁷¹ Under this paradigm, where the exterior is conceived as a threat, touching the Texture of the Other, and, simultaneously being touched by it, becomes a disgusting transgression, an obscene trespassing of the limits where the “I”, or the Self, begins.

⁷⁰ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 30.

⁷¹ See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Under this scheme, the viscous epitomizes a conflictive consistency in its stirring and blurring of boundaries, in its difficulty of being fixed. In other words, under the hegemony of the solid, the liminality and ambiguity of the viscous constitute a threat to be feared. By virtue of its excess, they call into question, overflowing, the dualist frame of this onto-epistemic regime. Texturally speaking, I argue that Sartre and Bachelard inherit this context of solid/liquid binary and hardened body exposed here. Within their onto-phenomenological texts, and their fear and disgust of, or the drive to control the viscous, there is an underlying ambiguity-phobia connected to the idea of a hardened body or solid “I”, in opposition to or completely split from an Other. Within the dualist western modern framework of thinking, which they are inscribing in but also reproducing, in-betweenness and ambiguity become undesirable conditions.

On Sartre's swamp

Slime as the aberrant Other

In *Being and Nothingness*,⁷² Jean-Paul Sartre develops an inquiry on human reality and human freedom through the framework of a phenomenological ontology. He is invested in understanding the nature of the relationship between human existence (ontology) and the material world (phenomenology) that appears at the core of the process of subjectivation of the “I”, and on his idea of freedom. His phenomenological ontology aims to give an account of the way in which matter activates or generates specific modes of being of the subject. In other words, he asks is, what is the ontological meaning of material qualities? The problematic here lies in trying to elucidate how the connection between the material qualities of an object and affects takes place. Here, Sartre is concerned with understanding how these impressions of the object are formed, echoing the old philosophical problem of realism and idealism. What would come first, the pure psychic states of the “I” that are later projected into the object (idealism), or the apprehension of material qualities that are thought to have an inherent or original affective charge (realism)?

While rejecting the psychoanalytical hypothesis of projection or transposition, by which pure psychic states are poured over the material qualities, Sartre's ontological model is neither giving a primacy of the object over the subject. Precisely, it is the viscous that will exemplify the sticky intertwining between them that, nevertheless, within a dualist scheme becomes problematic. His conception of existence is sustained by two modes of Being: the “being-for-itself” (*être-pour-soi*) and the “being-in-itself” (*être-en-soi*).

⁷² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.

The For-itself finds its own definition by negation, by what it is not. That is, it's a consciousness transcending the objects. It is the human, but not understood through its bodily or physical dimensions, but as being constituted entirely by its power to act and make choices in the encounter with the world. The for-itself, emanating from its choices, is what Sartre understands as freedom.⁷³ On the other hand, the In-itself is the being of the phenomenon, the plenitude of things or objects, contingent. This categorization, at the foundation of the Sartrean ontology, in which the for-itself has an ontological primacy over the in-itself, establishes a dualism of which the philosopher is well aware, and that he describes in the conclusion to his book as "insurmountable".⁷⁴ That is, insuperable, something that can't be conceived to be overcome. It is a dualism that, within his framework, seems unavoidable to be established, if we ought to make sense of the encounter between the subject and the world.

The viscous or *the slimy* becomes a paradigmatic example to illustrate the problematic embedded in the relationship between the self and the world. Appearing only in the very last chapter of *Being and Nothingness*, yet extremely relevant, the *viscous* is the consistency that carries material *ambiguity* with it. It will haunt Sartre's concluding reflections, oozing between the cracks of his theory, problematizing it. Within Sartrean theory, it is the For-itself that finds the being that it encounters, that is, affirms its freedom by appropriating and possessing the In-itself, the world.⁷⁵ As a material quality, the viscous is rendered as an In-itself that, however, problematizes the dualist ontological structure in which the For-itself (subject) has primacy over the In-itself (object) by the mode of appropriation.

"The slimy," writes Sartre, "reverses the terms; the For-itself is suddenly compromised".⁷⁶ Here, it is crucial to draw attention to the term "compromised." What is there

⁷³Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 599.

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 617.

⁷⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 602.

⁷⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 605.

to be protected about the For-itself? What exactly has been threatened, and, ultimately, compromised by the slimy? While Sartre writes that the slimy is not inherently repugnant,⁷⁷ that is, not disgusting by itself, or by its material qualities, the language of fear, disgust and struggle by which the slime (which is as well the in-itself) is described throughout his text, tells us a different story. The dissolution of a hierarchical relationship and boundary symbolized by the slimy causes extreme revulsion that seems to be simultaneously projected to its material qualities. In the text, Sartre asks himself what mode of being is symbolized by the slimy.⁷⁸ While still addressing this question, here, I am simultaneously asking, *why* does the slimy-mode-of-being pose such a sickening danger for the For-itself “which must be avoided”?⁷⁹

Not exactly conforming to the physical rules that guide the behaviors of liquidity or solidity, the slimy falls in an unsettling in-between. Not fully and clearly graspable as a solid that one can let go when pleased,⁸⁰ neither completely sliding and rolling over it as liquid, the slimy leaves lasting sticky traces on it, and slides and escapes between the fingers when one attempts to hold it. When touched, it causes a feeling of engulfing and sucking “like a leech”,⁸¹ pulling the hand into its thickness, density, and stickiness. It’s an inevitable embrace that has weight on it which blurs clear limits upon an encounter. It is this material ambiguity of slime – its neither-nor being – which troubles the possibility of appropriating it as an object. Immediately, writes Sartre,

the slimy reveals itself as essentially ambiguous because its fluidity exists in slow motion; there is a sticky thickness in its liquidity; it represents in itself a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid-that is, a tendency of the indifferent in-itself, which is represented by the pure solid, to fix the liquidity, to absorb the for-itself which ought to dissolve it [...] Slime is the agony of

⁷⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 605.

⁷⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 606.

⁷⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 611.

⁸⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 608.

⁸¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

water. It presents itself as a phenomenon in process of becoming; it does not have the permanence within change that water has but, on the contrary, represents an accomplished break in a change of state. This fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession⁸²

Hence, when the for-itself tries to possess the slimy (in-itself), it fails. And when “the terms are reversed”, that is, when the in-itself turns to have agency in the encounter, there is an imminent danger. It is then that it becomes a “poisonous possession”⁸³ – which implies that the previous model of possession by the For-Itself was an acceptable, harmless or innocuous one. The slimy constitutes, then, to the for-itself a trap.⁸⁴ Its appearance is fluid, but it is not, therefore deceiving. It seems like it will be docile⁸⁵ and that it will be complying with the hard or solid hand by its soft quality but is not.

Traversing all the text, it is the solid/liquid binary under whose terms, as an agony, the slimy, with its impermanent nature, and in constant transformation, ungraspable and a gooey excess, represents the struggle or even a battle with the fixed. It is the solid/liquid binary that constitutes the structure that will make out of the ambiguity of slime an aberrance and an abnormality. A *formless form* that, in its “ambiguous character as a substance in between two states”⁸⁶ leads Sartre to classify, from the very beginning, slime as an “aberrant fluid”⁸⁷. To be aberrant means to depart from an established standard, to diverge from the norm. Thinking of slime as aberrant, Sartre simultaneously outlines the limit and the failure of what this one should contain. It also implies what I call here a *consistency of the normal*.

The *consistency of the normal* is solid, is clearly defined, is enclosed, bordered, is individual and differentiable, similar to a heavy stone. It is the consistency of the Sartrean For-

⁸² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

⁸³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

⁸⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

⁸⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 608.

⁸⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 607.

⁸⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 607.

itself, unidirectionally reaching to the world, appropriating it, but not being appropriated by it, as this consistency is not porous. Defined by what-is-not, the rest that-is-not falls into a liquid flux, indeterminate, excessively open, contingent, homogeneous, and undifferentiated. Here, the textural binary solid/liquid finds its ontological correspondence in the Sartrean For-itself/In-itself. And it is within the establishment of these boundaries – exceeded by the viscous – that Sartre’s ontological anxieties are located, and the For-Itself put in risk:

If I dive into the water, if I plunge into it, if I let myself sink in it, I experience no discomfort, for I do not have any fear whatsoever that I may dissolve in it; I remain a solid in its liquidity. If I sink in the slimy, I feel that I am going to be lost in it; that is, that I may dissolve in the slime precisely because the slimy is in process of solidification. [...] To touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved in sliminess. Now this dissolution by itself is frightening enough, because it is the absorption of the For-itself by the In-itself as ink is absorbed by a blotter⁸⁸

The viscous encounter puts into question, or even mocks the *solid self*. The clear divide between the self and the Other, or the World, is exceeded when touching the slimy, when the contact blurs where the hand and substance begin and end. Simultaneously, it announces the impossibility to maintain a distance, and an intact surface, after establishing a relationship. In contact with slime, the self enters a mode in which it loses it-self: “the slimy appears as already the outline of a fusion of the world with myself”,⁸⁹ writes Sartre. It is the threat of a complete dissolution of the Outside, the Other, or the World towards the Self differentiates itself with. In contact with the viscous, the For-Itself is absorbed by its formlessness, not only failing at the attempt of possessing the slimy but becoming slimy itself. Sartre describes becoming slimy as a horrible outcome in comparison to becoming water.⁹⁰ The slimy fails the parameters of individualization and therefore is an undifferentiated body in which the for-itself can’t maintain

⁸⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 610.

⁸⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 606.

⁹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 610.

its individual primacy over the rest. In comparison to the contact with liquid or solid, the viscous encounter posits the risk of being engulfed and trapped by it. The mode of being symbolized by the slimy is an ambiguous mode of being, in which the limits become unclear or *formless*. This, precisely, is the heart of Sartre's *ontological fear/nightmare*.

Sartre's fear arises because of the encounter with an ambiguity that problematizes and calls into question the solid conception of the self ("I remain a solid in its liquidity"). The self, conceptualized as a solid entity or *construction* – also in the architectonic sense of the word –, is, ideally, impenetrable and in a defensive position towards the Other, the Object, the Outside, the World, the Slime – always at risk of being "compromised" by it. Forcefully abandoning a solid being, touching slime announces not simply a *sunken being* or a *self being sucked* – as the oppositional logic and dialectic on Sartre's thinking portraits – but perhaps, a *melting being* or a *being in constant melting*. A melt-in(g) that announces a softening of that solidity, transformed, a self that pours into the other at the same time as the other pours into the self. A *stirring* that blurs the dichotomic understanding of the being, its consciousness, and the world. A stirring that generates the Sartrean existential dizziness, the *nausea*. The mode of being symbolized by the slimy is more a "relation of being with itself",⁹¹ a continuity. But this continuity is threatening and disgusting, because it is the continuity of that against which the for-itself, the solid self, is categorically and foundationally opposed.

Within this ontological-material scheme, touching the slimy symbolizes touching the Other and, therefore, feeling closely its texture. The texture of the Other feels soft, yielding, sucking. It is slimy and, in its contact, causes an ambiguous sensation. It feels like an overflowing in-betweenness; a *deviant* texture, it becomes repulsive. It is aberrant, causing deep disgust and fear. The texture of the other becomes even more disgusting, when one discovers

⁹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 611.

that this is also the texture of oneself, that there is a continuity.⁹² This dissolves the fantasy of the ideal consistency of the normal. The aspect of revulsion is clearly underlined by the language Sartre employs to describe the slimy, as well through the adscription of categories that are implicitly considered, from an axiological, hierarchical perspective, of lower value, such as docility or passivity, softness or formlessness. Perhaps, not so casually, the categories used by Sartre to describe the slimy have also been traditionally adhered to the feminine, as I will develop on the following section.

Viscous disgust, abjection, and the feminine body

In *Purity and Danger*,⁹³ Mary Douglas offers an anthropological analysis of the relationship between societal and cultural norms and the classification of impurity. Douglas argues that a fundamental way in which human societies have created an order, and structure has taken place by categorizing objects, behaviors, or traits as well as individuals as either pure or impure. Simultaneously, the pure/impure binary is connected to the clean/dirty (or polluted); it is in this sense, argues Douglas, that one individual or behavior can become impure, polluting and therefore dangerous for society. Purity and danger appear as central elements in the formation of collective and individual subjectivities and identities, in that bodies are constituted by protecting themselves from what has been categorized as polluting and dangerous.

In Douglas' view, our perception appears mediated by an ordering system that fits or disqualifies facts. Thus, the way we perceive it is conditioned by a filtering mechanism which is at the same time a product of assumed cultural norms and the accumulation of lived experiences.⁹⁴ The schema, patterns and tendencies arising from it function through building stable categories – readable as solid – into which what is perceived fits or does not. In this view,

⁹² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

⁹³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

⁹⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 38.

perceiving is not a passive act, but rather something for which the individual is well responsible or. In other words, perceptions are a sense that is culturally and socially constructed. As Douglas writes, “in a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others.”⁹⁵

Here, the structuralist argument of Douglas takes the semantics of architectural language (“building”, “constructing”, “stable”) that suggests the solidity, and, therefore, as a consistency, the hardness and fixity, of the systems of classifications that order human experience. The link between the concept of “category” and solidity is nothing new within philosophical thinking, where, consequently, the outside or “the rest” is thought of as a liquid flux. It is here that viscosity also occupies a conceptual-material in-between as a *stirring*. In thinking about ambiguities and anomalies, Douglas briefly mentions Sartre’s ‘classic’ passage of the slimy to illustrate how these systems will always be insufficient or overflowed by lived experience. She mentions the text in a brief, anecdotal manner, and appears more marveled by the texture and poetics of the text than concerned about the disgust and fear Sartre feels towards the ambiguous, as is my focus of this thesis. Yet, I think a point can be made about the recurring connection between the ambiguous, as that which exceeds categorization, and the slimy. At the same time, Douglas is marveled by the Sartrean reflections of slime as an aberrant fluid.⁹⁶ In my work, I seek to elucidate the semantics of the viscous. In the following, I will consider in more detail how easily this connection between *aberrance* – that has an obvious negative connotation – and the viscous is made, and then taken for granted.

The ambiguity, or the slimy, as that which does not clearly fit into binary categories, appears as a problematic element that exceeds attempts at categorization. Ambiguity or anomaly

⁹⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 37.

⁹⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 39.

calls into question the system of classifications in which the subject confides to navigate and inhabit the world. Anomalies appear as anomalies – or, in Sartre’s terminology, aberrances – because they are produced as such by our systems of classification. Douglas argues that one could “force” those perceptual schemes, perhaps here suggesting a certain malleability to them, as we expand and change them through our exposure to different experiences. Nevertheless, this is not an easy task, since the limits of the subject and the culture are defined by what has been excluded in an accumulative way, and are the basis of a stability that, because of the sense of security that it supports, is hard to let go. Allowing ambiguity to come in could always pose a threat of shaking that “construction” which identity is. However, writes Douglas, “it is not always an unpleasant experience to confront ambiguity”.⁹⁷ Which is also one of the focal points of this research: to re-imagine or write the founded pleasures of ambiguity.

One of the crucial aspects of Douglas’ theory is that “when something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified”.⁹⁸ Here, the term “clarifying” suggests an act of cleansing towards the ideal of purity and cleanliness, opposing what is, by logic of exclusion, the polluted, dirty and dangerous. It is the exclusion of the ambiguous or anomalous, and its consequent categorization as impure or polluting, what will reassure and circumscribe the limits of the purity or pure subject. This is one of the main aspects of Douglas’ theory that Julia Kristeva, from a psychoanalytical perspective, will build on to give shape to her concept of “the abject”. While, with Douglas we are still in an implicit in/out binary in which these anomalies are something we can choose to welcome or not, with Kristeva, we enter in a dissolution of a clearly construed in/out, as she argues that those ambiguities, or that what has been excluded, are already within oneself. This realization causes a reaction of disgust, an affect that Douglas does not touch upon in her analysis. Yet, it is key to

⁹⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 38.

⁹⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 31.

understanding the prevailing tendency of linking slimy with the aberrant and the contact with it as repulsive.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*,⁹⁹ Kristeva explores the way in which identity and social norms are formed by abjection, an act of expelling and excluding what is perceived as endangering their borders. Kristeva delves into how the experience of abjection, such as encountering bodily fluids or the maternal body, evokes a visceral reaction that disrupts the boundaries of the self, challenging established categories of what is considered clean, pure, and, ultimately, acceptable. Through psychoanalytic and literary analysis, Kristeva reflects on how subjects experience the unsettling encounter with abjection and its role in the formation of subjectivity and cultural practices.

The abject, like the viscous, is a concept of liminality. An in-between, it is neither a subject, nor an object. The abject, writes Kristeva, is “what is opposed to the I”,¹⁰⁰ yet not a definable object. Stemming from the Latin *abiacere* (to reject), compounded by *ab-* (away) and *jacere* (to throw), the *abjectus* is that which is rejected through a *motion* towards the outside, from within. It is the result of a drive to distance oneself immediately from *it*. Throwing it away, far away. Or, if ingested, throwing it up, out of the own body. To elsewhere, to not-here. The abject is *that* which the subject seeks to expel in the process of *becoming* itself, both in the individual and social sense. In Kristeva’s words:

Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs

⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, reprint ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.

identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite¹⁰¹

The purity of the subject is obtained by establishing clear margins, clearing edges. But, as with Douglas' idea of purity, here, cleanliness is not so much about *what-is* inherently dirty. Rather, in a spatial sense, cleanliness depends on *where-that-is*, and only then, by subsequent location – or dis-location – it becomes dirty. As Douglas writes, “uncleanness is a matter out of place”.¹⁰² Which also means that, in opposition to an open “space”, there is a “place” that has been limited, that is, circumscribed with borders. And, by that act of definition, that place has been given meaning. Kristeva writes that the abject “draws me to the place where meaning collapses”.¹⁰³ There is a shift in motion. Like in Sartre's “revenge” – which, ultimately, is an inversion of a power dynamic – forces subvert. What was being possessed, the viscous In-Itself, is now possessing the solid For-Itself. Or, in Kristeva's imaginary: that which was expelled and rejected, thrown away by the subject, is now a force that *draws* the I to that meaningless space – to that liminality where the defined place of meaning touches the ineffable, the undefinable, the ambiguous.

Both in Sartre and Kristeva, we find the encounter of the One with the Other as a collapse – as we find in both texts the same language of engulfing, nausea, spasm. And it is in this collapse that, suggestively, Kristeva asks “how can I be without border?”¹⁰⁴. In other words, how to exist without those limits? Or how to exist in the moment of implosion of those boundaries? How to exist in that ambiguous excess? And the question posed already shows us the bewilderment of the I. An absence of sense, a non-sense – both in meaning and direction – , perhaps a de-orientation as Sarah Ahmed will propose in her *Queer Phenomenology*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

¹⁰² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41.

¹⁰³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

It is through abjection that the subject constitutes its borders, although it is confronted with a perpetual failure, since, as Kristeva emphasizes “one can’t part from it”. The abject “is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject”.¹⁰⁶ A revulsion arises with the realization that the own, inner, constitutive boundaries are circumscribed by what is rejected. Hence, in this case, the abject haunts from within. In Sartre’s text, the disgust, the *nausea*, is caused by this realization that the slimy, that aberrant texture of Other, is not only oneself, but within oneself. The viscous is co-constitutive of the For-Itself, it is impossible to part from it. The solid self has been formed through the exclusionary logic of being-not slimy, but is always there, threatening. An ontological threat, as realizing about this co-constitution, the subject realizes it can’t *exist* (to *be*) without it, either. In this in-between, danger looms. Kristeva writes that “we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger”.¹⁰⁷

Texturally speaking, ambiguity, as the abject, or as the viscous, is the disruption of a solid order, of established borders. The abject, the in-between, the ambiguous is what does not respect borders. It disturbs identity, category, system, order. It is precisely the way the Sartrean slimy is described. Or, in Freddie Mason’s words, the viscous encounter “disturbs the sense we serenely construct of ‘things’ on the one hand and ‘me’ on the other”.¹⁰⁸ Rejecting *that other* means to maintain, or wanting to maintain, borders that are solid against a possible filtration, or, in the worst scenario, an overflow. Even in constant failure, it means trying to hold back a fluidity.

¹⁰⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Mason, *The Viscous*, 21.

This attempt to contain fluidity is exactly what, in *Volatile Bodies*,¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Grosz points out when reflecting on the ways bodies are shaped and intervened by culture – and, in the process, being rendered abject. Underlining the cruciality of the somatic component present on Kristeva’s abject, Grosz exposes that this disgust is not to be read in terms of a body-less subjectivity, but rather as a tied the production of a specific type of corporeality: the hardened body. A solid entity that collapses through the *body fluids*, also crucial in the Kristevian abject.

Body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside [...] They affront a subject’s aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible “dirt” or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the “clean” and “proper.” They resist the determination that marks solids, for they are without any shape or form of their own. They are engulfing, difficult to be rid of; any separation from them is not a matter of certainty, as it may be in the case of solids. Body fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. In this sense, they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the limits of subjectivity in the body, the irreducible specificity of particular bodies¹¹⁰

If with Didi-Huberman the hegemony of the solid, that is, the primacy of form over matter, was a “material fantasy”, here the resisting indetermination of the fluids described by Grosz becomes a “material nightmare” for the Sartrean scheme of thought. The viscous haunts the fantasies of the hardened body. Oozing, it breaks through the cracks of a Self or an “I” that thought of itself as sealed. The viscous does not take revenge aggressively, as Sartre thinks. The viscous acts poetically, shattering the fantasy of the solid with its soft and tender consistency. And for this act of slimy vandalism, becomes horrific.

¹⁰⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.

¹¹⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 194.

But how the viscous, as a material, becomes horrific and disgusting is still here a question that deeply matters. One of the main concerns of Sartre in his passage on the slimy was to understand how material qualities get entangled with affects; “How can a handshake, a slime be(come) viscous?”¹¹¹ While wanting to distance himself from the hypothesis in which prior psychic states or affects are ascribed to material qualities, he develops a narration in which the viscous seems unavoidably disgusting at its contact. But, as feminist thinking has shown, there is no objective standpoint and neutrality does not exist.¹¹²

In his text, Sartre takes a clear position on the slimy, without questioning the biased nature of it – indeed, that is where the ideal of neutrality lies. There are several passages where he makes explicit connections between the viscous and the feminine body: the slimy displaying as “the flattening out of the full breasts of a woman who is lying on her back”,¹¹³ or feeling like a “moist and feminine sucking”,¹¹⁴ or its threatening character as a “sickly-sweet feminine revenge”.¹¹⁵ The previous question now unfolds into; “How can the feminine be(come) slimy?”.

The slimy or the viscous are properties of fluidity, perhaps in its more turbulent form. Then the question is also about the link between woman and fluidity traditionally established. In “The Mechanics of Fluids” Found in *The Sex which is not One*,¹¹⁶ by Luce Irigaray, she reflects on how the liquid existence attributed to femininity conditions the exclusion of the ruling symbolical order. Here, Irigaray elaborates on how the masculine order is of a solid kind, where, opposed to it, the fluid femininity appears as a disruption. Fluidity, specially withing gender studies, has been read as an unbounded positive and progressive value and can have the potentiality of breaking through the symbolical order of the solid. However, Irigaray points that

¹¹¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 611.

¹¹² Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouseTM: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

¹¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 608.

¹¹⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

¹¹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 609.

¹¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

within this system, the woman is the fluid that the system of solids require to maintain their proper order.

This is precisely where the work of Grosz is concerned with. The female body as a liquid body is also produced under a phallogocentric system that renders non-solid or non-masculine as unintelligible. In other words, the disgust and the horror caused by the viscous is dependent on the establishment and reproduction of a solid/liquid binary that is heavily gendered.

It is not that female sexuality is like, resembles, an inherently horrifying viscosity. Rather, it is the production of an order that renders female sexuality and corporeality marginal, indeterminate, and viscous that constitutes the sticky and the viscous with their disgusting, horrifying connotations. Irigaray claims that this disquiet about the fluid, the viscous, the half-formed, or the indeterminate has to do with the cultural unrepresentability of fluids within prevailing philosophical models of ontology, their implicit association with femininity, with maternity, with the corporeal, all elements subordinated to the privilege of the self-identical, the one, the unified, the solid¹¹⁷

Under this system of representation, there is a consistency of the normal that is being shaped. The rest falls into being an-Other, which texture is revulsive. And becoming revulsive because it disestablishes the notion of univocal masculine subject, the solid self. Here, disgust has widely functioned as a means for othering, supposedly as “biological” and “natural” reaction. But frequently, as in the case of Sartre, we see “disgust as disguise”. Portraited as a natural bodily reaction towards an unfamiliar and strange gooey consistency, this aversion is actually the result of a gendered dualist ontoepistemic scheme. That is, Sartre seems to comply with the sort of idealism that he wanted to reject in the first place or with what Ahmed calls a “figurability of disgust”.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, not only the result of it, it's also the specific means to

¹¹⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 195.

¹¹⁸ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 90

reproduce and maintain it. To keep the object of disgust far away from One, far out the drawn limits.

As Ahmed writes, the “movement is the work of disgust”.¹¹⁹ That is, this emotion involves specific kinetics: the motion or gesture of turning away. However, in the slimy, the possibility of easily escaping it, gets troubled. With the viscous or the slimy, if disgusted, one is stuck/sticked with what is causing that aversion. This is, perhaps, the origin of the claustrophobic tone of the Sartrean text. The point that I wish to underline from Ahmed’s reflections on disgust is how strongly tied this emotion is to bodies in contact. That is, disgust involves close contact with its object, a “sensuous proximity”.¹²⁰ And in this proximity, we find adherence between bodies, carrying the traces of one another even after the encounter is finished. Here, disgust becomes a “sticky affect”, with its object becoming sticky, saturated with affect, a site of personal and social tension”.¹²¹

Here, close contact puts at risk the ideal of a body as separable entity and an (im)permeable surface. Of a body that lives in the illusion of “surfacing” without being “surfaced”, in the illusory belief that touches, without being touched. Stickiness, writes Ahmed, “involves a form of relationality, or a ‘with-ness’, in which the elements that are ‘with’ get bound together”.¹²² “The nature of the encounter demonstrates that disgust involves not simply distancing by recoiling, but the intensification of bodily contact that ‘disturbs’ the skin with the possibility of desire”¹²³ This window for desire is however what we see negated in Sartre and, as I will point later in the case of Bachelard, only welcomed inasmuch as it can be controlled. The root of choosing only the path of recoiling and aversion might lie in the obsession for maintaining clear or controllable limits and distances. In other words, giving up on the risky

¹¹⁹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.

¹²⁰ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.

¹²¹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11.

¹²² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 91.

¹²³ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 88.

but potentially joyful or pleasurable possibility of the encounter would also mean giving up on the solidity of one's borders.

Perhaps the ambiguity relates to the necessity of the designation of that which is threatening: borders need to be threatened in order to be maintained, or even to appear as borders, and part of the process of 'maintenance-through-transgression' is the appearance of border objects. Border objects are hence disgusting, while disgust engenders border objects (Ahmed, 2014: 87)¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.

Handling the viscous and deceiving fascination: Bachelard

Gaston Bachelard is another philosopher intrigued by the way in which the phenomenological experience of matter influences human existence, not only in its psychological or imaginative sense, but also in its ontological sense. With his studies of the four elements – water, fire, earth, and air – Bachelard sought to offer a poetic and philosophical reflection on the way materiality – and, specifically, these four natural elements, shapes human reality. Here, I will draw on his books *Water and Dreams*¹²⁵ and *Earth and Reveries of Will*.¹²⁶ In those works, Bachelard reflects on the consistency of the viscous under the name of “the paste” (*la pâte*), describing it as a mixture of both Earth and Water. Drawing on psychoanalytic theories, Bachelard elaborates on the symbolic significance of water and earth, and their psychological and existential implications. While, in *Water and Dreams*, his interest lies more with the deep impact of water as a symbol of the feminine on human psyche and dreams, in *Earth and Reveries of Will*, he focuses on the association of earth with stability and our sense of identity.

Bachelard sustains that, through a philosophical doctrine of imagination, relationships between material and formal causality can be elucidated. However, he cautions that this is not possible through any kind of imagination. He develops a hierarchical distinction between two types of imagination: the “formal imagination” and the “material imagination”. The formal imagination belongs to the abstract realm of thought, where concepts and symbols are transformed according to mental constructs, operating mostly through symbolic representations and archetypes. Material imagination, on the other hand, is grounded in the phenomenological, sensory experience with the world of objects. The possibility of looking beyond the surface of

¹²⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983).

¹²⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 2002), 24.

things belongs to the material imagination, which manifests this intimate – as in deep and beyond – relationship with matter through poetic and evocative images.

digging into matter with one's fingers, discovering its substance beneath form and color gives one the illusion of touching the very essence of matter. Once the material imagination has opened the inner depths of substance to us, untold riches are ours. A material image dynamically experienced, passionately adopted, patiently explored, is an opening in every sense of the word, in its real sense and its figurative sense, it assures the psychological reality of the figurative, the imaginary. The material image transcends immediate existence and deepens superficial existence¹²⁷

To Bachelard, the images of matter through material imagination are of higher ontological value, since “the eye assigns them names, but only the hand truly knows them”.¹²⁸ “The hand” and its fingers are a crucial figure in Bachelard's view of the relationship between existence and matter. The centrality of the hand in his reflections echoes the Heideggerian *hammer*, the tool through which the Being of Dasein can transcend its immanence to the world in the phenomenological encounter. However, in Bachelard's imaginary, the hand has become the hammer itself; the “hand of the worker” doesn't any longer need a tool to act upon the world, the worker's tools are their own hands. The cruciality of the hand and, moreover, of the action of the hand in Bachelard's ontology are clearly expressed in the following sentence: “a person's whole being comes to life when the hand takes control of matter”¹²⁹. But what kind of hand is Bachelard's hand? This last quote is already giving a clue on “what type” of hand this will be: deceptively curious and playful, desiring and fascinated, nevertheless seeking control and dominance as a key to selfhood or affirming the subjecthood over objecthood.

¹²⁷ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 24.

¹²⁸ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1.

¹²⁹ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 91.

This hand is the “dynamic hand” of the worker that Bachelard who, very fond of establishing dichotomies in his system, defines in opposition to another hand: “the caressing hand”.¹³⁰ The caressing hand is associated to a soft touch on the surface of things and, therefore, to the formal imagination, which does not give us the real nature of things, opposed to a dynamic hand that, with its activity, becomes a solid and hard force than can access (penetrate) the depth of things, related to material imagination. The dynamic hand of the worker is the key to not only the images of higher ontological value, but the key for the “being coming into life”. This hand that approached the viscous dough becomes a cogito of kneading¹³¹ with its work- “I knead, therefore I am”.

Throughout the texts, Bachelard highlights the cruciality of the ambivalences of matter bound to material imagination and how, for deep and soulful engagement, there must be a “dual participation of desire and fear, good and evil, black and white”.¹³² In its ambiguity, the paste seems to be a “double reverie of form and matter that suggest the most powerful themes for creative imagination”, and the basis of a “truly intimate materialism”, providing an “elemental experience with matter”.¹³³ Plasticity and malleability – characteristics made possible with the admixture between water and earth – are vital to material imagination; the soft matter of mud should be valorized.¹³⁴ Despite this recognized cruciality, the viscous (under the forms of it as “the paste”, “the clay”, “the dough”) is only dedicated space in-between – note the poetic irony of it – *Earth* and *Water*. This could also be read as sign of this evasive, slippery nature of the viscous, oozing between cracks unavoidably, inevitably present, but at the same time avoided,

¹³⁰ ,Wendy O’Shea-Meddour, “Gaston Bachelard’s L’Eau et Les Rêves: Conquering the Feminine Element,” *French Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (February 2003), 97.

¹³¹ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 59.

¹³² Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 11.

¹³³ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 104.

¹³⁴ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 80.

left to the side, seen as a complement to the main elements, a mixture receiving a lower degree of attention. And yet, viscosity changes it all.

But how does Bachelard approach this viscosity, its malleability, plasticity, and ambiguity? What exactly happens when the hand touches the viscous? How is that viscous encounter written? In *Water*, Bachelard seems to approach the viscous in a more fantastic, dreamy and fascinating way. While still arguing that the hand of the worker will affirm itself over the paste, there is a more playful approach to it. However, the chapter in *Earth* dedicated specifically to the paste, called “valorization of mud”, leads to imply that matter, by itself, despite being fascinating in its formlessness, only becomes valorized when it is worked by the hand. It is the action of the worker, or the *homo faber*, that makes it valuable. In *Earth*, a male fantasy of domination through kneading takes primacy, revealing itself as fundamental to his conceptualization of the viscous:

On the theme of viscosity, however, we can recognize a difference between the existentialism of real matter and a doctrine of the material imagination. For me, the material imagination of soft substances is essentially concerned with labor. Viscosity, then, is only a passing offense, a skirmish between reality and the laborer in which the dynamism of the latter ensures victory. Active material imagination of this sort is scarcely affected by the vertigo Sartre invokes when he writes of viscosity. [...] [the fascination with the slimy] continues, no doubt, if we take no action, if we experience viscosity on its own terms! But if we work viscosity, all is changed. For one thing, in kneading, if dough sticks to the fingers, a sprinkling of flour is enough to clean the hands. We can domesticate the viscous through an indirect attack with dry matter. At the mixing bowl we are demiurges. We determine the destiny of matter¹³⁵

Introducing the dimension of labor, Bachelard resolves the viscous encounter through its domestication. The kneader is also, ontologically speaking, a way of talking about a being

¹³⁵ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 88.

that forms itself through action or, more precisely, oppositional action upon matter. That is, “the human being is revealed as the being *opposed* to things, not siding *with* things but standing up *to* them”,¹³⁶ establishing a direct link between dialectical response and a sense of liberation. For Bachelard it is labor and, specifically in this matter, the work of the hand, that allows the self to transcend, via taming and overcoming, the viscous: “a person’s whole being comes to life when the hand takes control of matter”.¹³⁷ Through this act of domination, matter is, again, rendered passive, and the excess contained. Personhood steams from objecthood. That is, from affirming the “I” *over* the “other”. Over as the viscous beneath the hand, dominating it and, in the process, categorizing it an opposite within a hierarchy that renders its value less as simultaneously depriving it from any sort of agency.

Here, the initial fascination of the paste/the viscous shows its roots in perceiving this ambiguity as a pleasurable playground¹³⁸ only when one is de facto presumed to be the winner of the game. When one is confident, one will not be overpowered by it, like the kneader who can always “sprinkle some flour over the dough” to bring the slimiest and stickiest viscous to an end – to a manageable end as in solid, fixed and stable. The hand of the worker penetrates where the eye cannot reach, “they take sticky substances and impose a hard future upon them”.¹³⁹ The intimate material knowledge announced by Bachelard, acquired by touch, and not vision, founded on the textures and consistencies, and their feeling, reveals itself as an obscure way of contact. While initially trying to sound more appealing to the feminist ear contesting the traditional association eye-truth or knowledge acquired by vision, the underlying reality is that the hand of Bachelard, the tool of the subject, is made of fingers of domination

¹³⁶ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 90.

¹³⁷ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 91.

¹³⁸ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 24.

¹³⁹ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 89.

that seek control over the matter as an act of affirmation, turning the formless into form, modeling the “docile” clay or dough.

Bachelard describes an unfurling – and I believe, shared - excitement on the worker’s power over a matter that is resistant, yet giving in to the hand of the worker. This “excitement” is rooted in the “masculine joy of penetration and feeling the insides”.¹⁴⁰ that gets heightened, as in a rape fantasy – a wide-spread thought within western philosophical thought when thinking about nature as a woman to be dominated¹⁴¹ or unknown lands for the colonizers,¹⁴² when there is a resistance that is, nevertheless, to be overcome by force. Within this violent phallogocentric logic that sustains the binary solid/liquid, and taking on his psychoanalytical frame, solid symbolizes the erect penis (hard) and, consequently, a repulse of the flaccid one that could be then read as liquid or viscous (soft), just like the “female” sexual organs.

My attention and close reading of Bachelard came from the need to uncover the dreams of domination underlying the fascination with the viscous and its ambiguity. What I wish to underline, after understanding the gender bias and misogyny present in Bachelard’s thinking of the materials, and the emerging of subjecthood, is that this fascination is more similar to the erotic attraction towards an object that is perceived as exotic, inasmuch as one is drawn to it while still clearly differentiating oneself from it, and, ultimately, keep it under control – not exceeding those boundaries. In Bachelard, there is a sort of recreation in that dream of deformation and dissolution. Some pleasure is found in that absence of shape, in formlessness, but mainly because Bachelard conceives, unlike Sartre, that there can be an end to it. For Sartre, there is no end to the viscous. His vertiginous realization comes from understanding slime as

¹⁴⁰ Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 107.

¹⁴¹ See: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

¹⁴² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

the constitutive texture of the being-with-others, of the constant encounter that existing in the world means.

This constitutes the main difference between Sartre and Bachelard; the former turns away from the viscous, in fear and disgust, acknowledging this unescapable viscous continuity between the self and the Other. The latter is confident in dominating/taming the viscous, establishing a distance from it through labor. Bachelard more explicitly opens the possibility of negating and “resolving” this ambiguity, while in Sartre, it is not completely negated insofar as insoluble, but deeply problematic. What both authors have in common is that this ambiguity is something to be avoided or solved, as it comes to exceed the binary framework it is conceptualized from. Therefore, in both authors, dealing with the viscous sparks a fear that has to be extinguished in a way, or another. Here, the viscous remains as the opposed, Other. From this perspective, ambiguity appears as a problem to be resolved: as an ontological and phenomenological terrorist attack (the *slimy vandalism*) to the well-established conceptions of self within a fixity and a flowing or liquid outside, a glitch that shows an interconnection, an intermingling, a profound and constitutive slimy entanglement that risks the stability of the solid subject.

III. THE SLIMY BODY IS...

Non-vertical

I am in the *Gootopians* workshop by Doris Uhlich for Impulstanz Festival in Vienna in the summer of 2023. I was extremely lucky to, last-minute, be able to participate on it. After seeing *Gootopia* years ago, I had now the chance to play, dance and be close with that slime that had become my material and theoretical obsession since then. I could research with my body. Naked, wet, sliding around.

We are around 50 people in this boiling hot school gym under the sun of Vienna in July. We have all been told to bring a big bucket with us, and so we did. These buckets are handed to Philomena, the chemist of the Gootopian team and, around them curious heads gather close to each other. Everyone wants to know the composition of this slime that will not be revealed here. She walks us into making the slime that will become our close friend and even, extension of our body for the whole weekend. The slime is organic and made of simple ingredients and, therefore, must be done fresh every day. Its alive, it reacts to the heat of the room, gets dirty and could rotten.

But before getting wet and dancing with *the* slime, we dance with *our* slimes. Both mornings we start the day with a viscous approach to the practice of “fat dance” developed by Doris over the years. This technique brings awareness to the different motions that might inhabit the body and its flesh, its skin, its fluids. The focus is not on mimicking the gooeyness of a substance, but rather to locate, feel and touch the sliminess of our own bodies and transform it into a quality of movement. This movement takes many forms: of a voluminous extension, of a slow dripping, of frictions within the tensions and solidities in our bodies. In this shaking and

melting, the usual sense of structure is compromised. Now we are a bit softer. Now we are ready to dance with the slime.

For a couple of hours, we delve into different practices with the liters and liters of gooeyness in the space. We have our personal and intimate one-to-one moment with the slime. I empty the bucket in front of myself. This yellowish slime spreads in the floor, moving slowly but at the same time its thickness putting a slow break to that motion. I put my hands on it, I stretch it. Its' cold, it's heavy and very elastic, stretching until an extreme where this resistance without breaking becomes puzzling and mesmerizing. I take it all, I put it over my head and let it drip, let it drip... until slowly wraps me in a moving second skin. I can barely breath under it. I feel tripping, materially inside the theories and readings I was already working on for this thesis. I love it.

We also have collective dances with the rest of slimy and fleshy bodies in the room. The floor is very slippery and so are our naked bodies, with every inch covered in slime, with our sweat and its gooeyness mingling, now sharing a molecular intimacy. To dance together, we have to un-learn the rules of the solid and the dry. We need to accommodate a new type of temporality where things go slower, in a troubled flow – even if sometimes, the sliding can be fast. I think on the ruminant ontoepistemology proposed by Lucrecia Masson where through the figure of the cow and a decolonial perspective, shifts the attention on the excess – of flesh and fat – and on lenticitude. In “Echarse con Vacas” (*To Lay With Cows*)¹⁴³ she points to her necessity to adopt a different body perspective to theorize. She abandons biped position in order to be able to imagine with the slow temporality of the cows, the lenticitude needed to ruminate, giving time to the process – food and thought. In this pond of slime, I think in resonance. In the

¹⁴³ Masson, “Echarse Con Vacas,” 2024.

slimy phenomenology, Lucrecia's cows greet the slugs that accompany me: moist, slow, un-hurried. The temporality of the viscous is sluggish.

Not only slower, but the slimy body also thinks better horizontally, or in *inclination*. But definitely not in verticality. In this gooey onto-phenomenological dance, balance and stability don't come from a point of statism. Hardening the body becomes counter-productive and sharp geometries make the body fall harder into the ground. Dancing with the slime requires a softening and melting of movements, a tender awareness of the precarity of this balance that has to be constantly re-negotiated with an-other body, with the viscous substance. It requires to move other-wise, it forces to think-other wise.

This rebellion against the tyranny of verticality is another act of slimy vandalism. Following the thoughts of Adriana Cavarero on *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*,¹⁴⁴ Victoria Pérez Royo writes on how the inclination of the subject allows to move away from the egocentric verticality of the nuclear and sovereign subject towards a decentralized body.

The vertical thus embodies the figure of a self-contained 'I', which abstracts its context in order to assert its-self, its self-belonging, whose reference for action and passion is always itself. The modern subject, founded on a paradigm that has naturalized it as masculine, independent, and autonomous, occupies the center stage of Western cultural imagery in a vertical position. It is the upright, correct, erect man.¹⁴⁵

Victoria writes from the perspective of living arts where the body in scene has also the potentiality of rehearsing and experimenting with non-hegemonic corporealities, making them places of theoretical imaginations. The inclined subject is then a dislocated body that has expelled the "I" outside of itself. It is a *cuerpo fuera de sí*, a *body out of its self*. In the slimy

¹⁴⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Pérez Royo, *Cuerpos Fuera de Sí*, 59.

phenomenology, where the linearity and centralization of the I is compromised, the narcissistic gloating of the subject with itself and For-Itself loses its value.

Sara Ahmed echoes this verticality of the subject when, writing about sexual orientation, points to the way the bodies get “straightened up”. She comments on Merleau-Ponty’s - who will be as well a fierce critique of Sartre’s dis-embodied ontophenomenology - emphasis on the “queer moments” in which “the world no longer appears the “right way up”¹⁴⁶ to expose how heterosexuality is a mode of becoming vertical.

the normative can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, which puts some objects and not others in reach. The normative dimension can be redescribed in terms of the straight body, a body that appears “in line.” Things seems “straight” (on the vertical axis), when they are “in line,” which means when they are aligned with other lines. Rather than presuming the vertical line is simply given, we would see the vertical line as an effect of this process of alignment.¹⁴⁷

The mode of being of the regime of verticality, produces a tendency of straightening up those “queer effects” in the ways in which the bodies relate with each other and with the space. Under the regime of verticality queerness is then a twisted sexuality, not following a straight line.¹⁴⁸ In viscous words, becoming vertical or straightened is another variant of the hardening of the body that a phenomenology of the slimy disturbs. In this sense, being inclined - now read here also as a queer effect- constitutes a re-orientation from the specific mode of being that verticality – normality – imposes.

The inclined and sluggish body is also a queer body that has this undoing as a principle of being. Undoing, as the body is also part of a context of objects, bodies and spaces that solidify, harden or straighten it up. But as in the “fat dance” morning sessions of the workshop

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 65.

¹⁴⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 65.

¹⁴⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67.

where we experiment with liquefying our flesh and its extension, somatic practices as well as the contact with performance pieces and theoretical imaginations can offer ways of dislocating, dissolving, slowing down and inclining the body. And in this sense, I consider these as important stirring practices and methods to speculate with when trying out and playing with other kinds of corporealities that want to dance their way out of the hegemony of the solid.

A convoluted surface

This slimy body is dancing. It exists in motion, in constant change and shape-shifting. The malleability and plasticity of viscosity inevitably brings the need to think about movement. Here, rheology becomes a fruitful approach where to re-think from corporeality outside of the hegemony of the solid. A branch of physics, rheology focuses on the study of states of deformation and fluctuation of matter. From the perspective of rheology and the science of materials, that in Laura Tripaldi aligns with a new materialist feminist perspective, the solid/liquid binary becomes a reductionist approach to materials that is unable to give account of their transformation and behavior that, we could say, happens in “the in-between” of viscoelastic materials such as slime. This perspective opens a way to think the body as in a constant state of deformation. As Tripaldi points out,

experiences such as solidity and liquidity, often involve a combination of visual and tactile sensations evolving dynamically through time. The rheological answer to the solidity problem introduces an interesting perspective, that is, that there is no such thing as an absolute solid, or, more precisely, that solidity is not an instantaneous experience, but it is necessarily related to how things evolve across time and space”¹⁴⁹

To depart from the solid, in its fixity and stability, as the base-state of a body introduces a problem of immobility where these constitutive fluctuations and encounters become undesirable changes or relationality perceived as disturbance. Tripaldi argues that while classic newtonian physics “tells us about a simple universe made up of point masses moving along trajectories, it is only through an understanding of the relational structure of the materials around us that we can account for our experience of a dynamic and multiform universe.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Tripaldi, “Libidinal Rheology,” 70.

¹⁵⁰ Laura Tripaldi, *Parallel Minds: Discovering the Intelligence of Materials* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), 64.

Most importantly, what rheology brings to the understanding of the body as slimy is a shift in the focus of attention: what matters here is not if viscosity “represents a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid”,¹⁵¹ that is, if it’s in process of becoming One or the Other. What matters here is precisely the ambiguity of that process. A queer and viscous phenomenology looks to the body attending to what the ambiguity of this encounter unfolds without needing to fix it in a stable state or without considering it as a threat. The viscous encounter “disturbs the sense we serenely construct of “things” on the one hand and “me” on the other”.¹⁵² From the hegemony of the solid and hardened body, this represents an exceptional case of slimy vandalism. However, a viscous corporeality and queer phenomenology point to encounter and relationality as constitutive rather than anomalies.

In this deformation, the slimy body is a *convoluted surface*.¹⁵³ That is, intricately folded and twisted. A surface. That what denotes the bounding or limiting parts of a body, a boundary. That what is on the top (*sur-*) of a layer. However, how the way this surface is thought, or more specifically, as *what kind* of limit, impacts radically the way in which we think and imagine the interactions between bodies – and their surfaces. From the perspective of the science of materials, Laura Tripaldi points out that the important part about a material is usually not its structure or composition but rather “what happens in the region where the encounter between *that material and something else* takes place – an encounter which may be simple but is more often a complicated affair”.¹⁵⁴ That is, the surface is not thought as a divisor line between bodies, but on the contrary, as material region of encounter. As a membrane where the contact with other bodies becomes the reason of its behavior, a product of a relationship of – at least –

¹⁵¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 607.

¹⁵² Mason, *The Viscous*, 21.

¹⁵³ Tripaldi, “Libidinal Rheology,” 70.

¹⁵⁴ Laura Tripaldi, *Parallel Minds: Discovering the Intelligence of Materials* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), 6.

two directions”.¹⁵⁵ In other words, this encounter is not an exception, but rather, this close-contact is transformative and constitutive.

Surfaces define the boundary between inside and outside, but the boundary is not simply a theoretical function indicating an abrupt interruption of the bulk, rather it is a material layer with a certain thickness and intrinsic physicochemical properties that determine its behavior. This is relevant because there is a strict correlation between surfaces and identity in the sense that we generally perceive a particular object to be *one with itself* in virtue of its resistance towards the deformation of its surface or the opening of new surfaces.¹⁵⁶

Identity then, or a sense of self can be then understood as a coagulated state of the constant fluctuations of a body. A body that bends while still not breaking. Deformation does not become rupture or fracture. But the slimy body, made in encounter, is in a constant re-definition of those boundaries. “The surface might still be a limit but is a soft and tender one, a membrane that contracts and expands with the contact with other bodies, a membrane whose authentic nature is that of the Moebian ribbon; that is, a non-oriented surface”.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Laura Tripaldi, *Parallel Minds: Discovering the Intelligence of Materials* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), 7.

¹⁵⁶ Tripaldi, “Libidinal Rheology,” 73.

¹⁵⁷ Tripaldi, “Libidinal Rheology,” 75.

De-oriented

The slimy hand palpates. Gets a sense of what exceeds its own body – other bodies, a surrounding world – by touching around; the textures, the shape, the contours... It orientates itself through not-knowing. That is, the slimy hand is an articulation of a *Queer Phenomenology* where being oriented is not taken as a given. On the contrary, as Sara Ahmed shows, the state of being lost and de-oriented is rather prior and foundational to the security and stability of what we usually feel as being “oriented”.

For Ahmed, in the phenomenological sense, orientations refer to the way in which bodies are directed towards objects and spaces, shaping the sense of belonging and the understanding of the world. Here, “being oriented” appears as following usual or familiar paths both by being shared by a cultural and social context and by acts of repetition, as part of identity-making. Simultaneously, to regularly transit certain paths makes orientations appear natural or assume the status of a norm. But far from given, orientations are shaped by the encounter of bodies with objects. This contact does not happen in a void or in the absence of a specific set of conditions. Importantly, Ahmed underlines that the objects that are in reach and how spaces are configured is not unbiased, as “what is reachable is determined by the orientations we have already taken”.¹⁵⁸ That is, orientations are also conditioned by the orienting-lines marked by or inscribed in the social and political context the body lives in.

Under this scheme, de-orientations then appear as mere deviations from that familiarity and habituality that constitutes “a ground”. That is, as effects or products of the usual “ways to be” in the world, profoundly displeasing, nevertheless. In her text, Ahmed connects the concept of de-orientation to queerness and racialized bodies. Under the status of the norm of the heterosexual and white orientation, other sexualities or black and brown bodies then become

¹⁵⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 55.

deviant. But, as Ahmed writes, “to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things”.¹⁵⁹

De-orientations are not simply straying from norms. Most importantly, they are disruptive insofar as they reveal the contingency of those norms themselves. De-orientations challenge the fixed and stable sense of self that orientation promises. Touch-reading Ahmed’s text with slimy hands, orientations feel as “the consistency of the normal”, a coagulation of norms in bodies while de-orientations bring to them the unsettling ambiguous quality of the viscous. However, for Ahmed, this disruption is far from being understood in a negative sense. Rather, this slimy act of vandalism is a generative gesture of an aperture towards another possible (dis)order of things;

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground or one’s belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown¹⁶⁰

In their constitutive ambiguity de-orientations can’t be grasped under a clear idea of determinacy. In the viscous encounters of Sartre and Bachelard, the viscous is seen under the prism of the solid/liquid binary that wishes to end that indeterminacy. There, the viscous is seen as being in the process of either becoming solid or liquid but unable to stay in that in-between.

¹⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.

¹⁶⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 157.

While enigmatic and fascinating, this ambiguity is nevertheless contemplated from the perspective of solving it. From the tendency of foreseeing the behavior of another body – a security needed to maintain the solidity of the Self. For Ahmed, de-orientation might or might not become a new orientation. It comes from and brings with it an unexpected contact with the unknown. Here, these queer and viscous moments are not “a passing offense or skirmish between the reality and the subject”.¹⁶¹ On the contrary, Queer phenomenology is about redirecting the attention to those queer, deviant moments¹⁶² without needing to solve them. One of the gestures of a queer phenomenology is to understand de-orientations not as transversal but as foundations of what being oriented might feel like.

The corporeality presented by Ahmed here, is a body constantly re-orienting itself, made by un-doing. This body knows ambiguity and instability as grounds, even if slippery and trembling. From a queer perspective, where the solid self has lost its hegemonic position, the idea of de-stabilizing encounters doesn't mean an attack or a threat anymore. This body is seen in motion, through its changing consistencies without needing to fix them. Through a queer phenomenology “we are not searching for permanence, but to listen to these de-orientations, dis-locations, listen to what “fleets”.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 88.

¹⁶² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 3.

¹⁶³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 106.

Existing in friction

The slimy body is a queer body. To read this body with the viscous opens the understanding of these constant de-orientations and re-orientations as part of the plasticity and potential of trans-formation of the slimy sense of corporeality. However, this malleability is not comparable to the quality of being unbounded behind the conceptualizations of fluidity regarding, for instance, gender identity. In her article "Situating Fluidity: (Trans)Gender Identities and Feminist Theories of Embodiment", Erin Calhoun Davis¹⁶⁴ is critical of the over-reliance on fluidity as a concept in feminist and queer theory. While fluidity is often celebrated for its potential to destabilize the rigidity and fixity of binary understandings of gender, Davis shows that, in many ways, the lived experience of trans persons gets obscured under the promises of an unbounded type of freedom connected to it.

Davis is critical of the presence of the dualism fluidity/stability in queer feminist theories where fluidity is often portrayed as a gesture of resistance and freedom from a rigidity. Here, transsexed individuals end up being positioned as "either blurring or reifying the boundaries of the gender binary".¹⁶⁵ However, what gets obscured here is "the everyday practices and experiences of transgender identity construction".¹⁶⁶ In the article, Davis exposes a sociological study on the way trans individuals live or experience their bodies in daily life situations that involve, in one way or another, their gender performance. In it, Davis narrates the quotidian decisions of the trans interviewees that, depending on the social and cultural context, tend to become more or less visible or more or less coherent with respect to their gender identity towards the public. The way the body makes body is never in isolation: the rest of the objects, spaces and bodies have an impact on the surface of the body. That is, on the way they

¹⁶⁴ Davis, "Situating 'FLUIDITY'," 97–130.

¹⁶⁵ Davis, "Situating 'FLUIDITY,'" 99.

¹⁶⁶ Davis, "Situating 'FLUIDITY,'" 99.

also surface.¹⁶⁷ This involves the lived experience of the body as well as its presentation to the outside. As Mason writes, “something else that rheology teaches us is that a substance’s viscosity is never fully on display. All materials change their quality depending on how you interact with them; viscosity is a relational event”.¹⁶⁸

That is, read in rheological terms, what the study presented by Davis shows is that the trans bodies liquefy or solidify depending on the forces that they encounter. That is, their change of consistencies and changing consistency. Viscosity emphasizes a resistance to flow, the way a substance moves or shifts in response to pressure or force, but never without some level of friction or resistance. This metaphor offers a nuanced way of thinking about queer identities, as a unilateral insistence on an unbounded potential of a fluid ambiguity leaves unattended or misrepresented those tensions.

What Davis is concerned about is that under the liquid/solid binary, “fluid disruptive, transgressive beings are juxtaposed with intelligible, coherent, stable, hegemonic beings. However, rather than disrupt the gender order, unintelligibility may disrupt individual lives”.¹⁶⁹ In other words, the “liberating” fluidity might not always be desirable or, by default, the consistency that brings with it an unconditional sense of freedom or, in a more casual or quotidian sense of life, easiness. In the same way, viscosity, in its ambiguity and liminality, should not be understood as inherently liberating. Rather, what I propose is to understand queer identity through the quality of liminality, mutability, and in-betweenness of viscosity that inherently comes with internal frictions overlooked in fluidity. It is precisely in the attention to tensions wherein the potential of viscosity as a material figure to think queer embodiment lies. It also highlights the liminality of the queer bodies, in a slippery dance between unintelligibly and intelligibility. As a material metaphor to read the way in which trans bodies “seek to create

¹⁶⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

¹⁶⁸ Mason, *The Viscous*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Davis, “Situating ‘FLUIDITY’,” 102.

coherent selves while also acknowledging and often embracing transitions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities”.¹⁷⁰ What the viscous and the rheological perspective brings to queer theory is, staying with that ambiguity while still attending to those frictions.

¹⁷⁰ Davis, “Situating ‘FLUIDITY’,” 103.

Opaque

Somehow the space and time there feels dislocated. Hungover. Like skin that is peeling. Like being inside a membrane in the exact yet ambiguous moment of separation. Unstable, but holding you from within. It feels like the end of a night that is going to be intensely stretched. A passage to what is yet to come, completely unknown and unpredictable and, perhaps, for that very reason, deeply tempting. There, in a dispersed everywhere, slime awaits: on the floor, inside buckets, dripping from a hanging structure, spilled over flesh. Scattered in the space, the naked bodies of the performers seem in a viscous trance of their own. Each one of them in such an extremely intimate relationship with the slime that it even feels like a transgression to look. Viscous voyeurism. But this brutal closeness is not meant to be private. Quite the opposite, the flesh-slime configurations are an invitation to be seen, to be felt, to be touched. It's warm here. And the music swallows you in.

It's like a nightclub for slugs. A place that has found you, but that you are sure you would never be able to find again. It feels ephemeral, asking to be enjoyed only while it is possible. Bits of late summer daylight come through the few small windows that remain uncovered, suggesting that this space is not fully enclosed. There is an "outside", but it is only a distant possibility now. *Then*. And it gets far off as the sun sets and the room darkens, in this journey that we share for 4 hours and a half.

The high-ceiling warehouse that Brut Norwest is, where pieces usually happen inside a theater of removable structure, lies here open like a bare body, showing each of its corners to the guests. Different stations await these visitors: a bench with a row of "treaters" in spa-like robes, a big mass of slime that will be held collectively to build a landscape, a circle of buckets to experiment with slime hardening in one's hand as if it would be a tight glove or a second skin, "eggs" of slime to eat and taste, a vibrating platform to lie on and a conversation between

Doris Uhlich - the choreographer - and Susanne Wedlich - the author of *Slime. A Natural History* to be heard through earphones.

In *Gootopia: the Treatment*, the visitors enter in groups and are invited to join a circuit of the slimy treatments described above guided by a rotating performer. The round lasts approximately 15-20 minutes, after which the visitor can freely wander and sit around the space and the de-centralized stages which, in the same way as in *Gootopia* (2021) are simply demarcated by irregular low silicone dams. These treatments are offerings and invitations to touch slime, a play through which a brief wandering collectivity emerges. A collectivity that will be also shared with the performers and the rest of the persons attending as, once we have touched slime, we are in this together. The invitation to touch can also feel daring since the viscous usually generates an ambivalent reaction of simultaneous revulsion and attraction. But perhaps it is also daring because it entails a form of intimate contact, to be involved with – in closeness – to put one's body there too. That is, to abandon the role of the passive spectator and the distance and protection of the non-tactile gaze. After touching slime, it is not so easy to stay away from the material, from the bodies of the performers. Affectively, it sticks to you. In this closeness, there is an intimate tactile knowledge – when does the consistency change? Is it thicker? Is it runnier? How does it stick to me? And, it's heavy and light. Oh, and its sound. Touch opens a sensual way of knowing and communicating with the substance surrounding us, a way of imagining with matter.

And this sensual way of knowing by touch is opened from the very beginning, with a slimy hand massage as a greeting. The visitors sit in a bench in front of a row of performers waiting for them with a bucket full of slime between their legs. I had the immense pleasure of being one of these treaters. The gaze of this text is mine.

Change of perspective. An *affectimage*.

Two persons sit in front of me. I look them in the eyes, and I hold their hand in mine, feeling the sensation of a familiar dry warmth that will soon abandon them. With my other hand I take the slime out of the bucket and bring it up to our holding hands to be embraced by it. The firmness of the handshake is now compromised. With the slimy, we tremble, we slide, we feel its weight, its wetness, its coldness. Our fingers glide with each other, and between them, the slime rests, showing up in translucent threads when we depart from each other.

For approximately a minute, the hand-dance begins: fingers are runny and playful, we go up and down, our fleshy surfaces glide now with each other. In this viscous trance, “you” and “me” gets blurred, or it simply doesn’t matter. We are in this together. But aren’t we always? Commenting on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and how bodies get into contact with each other, Ahmed writes, “what touches is touched, and yet ‘the toucher’ and ‘the touched’ do not ever reach each other; they do not merge to become one”.¹⁷¹ While still being “your” hand and “my” hand, what the blurriness and the messiness signifies is an absence of a hierarchy. To touch is always to be-with.

The confusion between these is posed as a threat when, phenomenologically speaking, the point of departure of embodiment requires that primacy of the subject over the object, like in the “possessive mode” of Sartre or in the “kneading cogito” of Bachelard.

Nausea in the hands! [...] Before anything slightly insidious or shifty, the separation between subject and object is poorly realized, the toucher and the thing touched are blurred, the one too slow, the other too yielding. The World is my Nausea, a Sartrean Schopenhauer might claim. The world is glue, pitch, paste—always too pliant; a dough that softly kneads the kneader, and whispers to the hand the material absurdity that it should loosen its grip, renounce its labor¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 106.

¹⁷² Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 87.

From this perspective, to give in – even if temporarily – to the viscous is to give up on oneself, to renounce to the finality of the hands to possess. In this Gootopian viscous greeting treatment, our hands are the fingers of the *slimy body*: curious, playful, messy and perhaps even purposeless - without a clear objective or destination. They touch knowing that there is always “risk” in relationality, the “risk” meaning unpredictability, a component of uncertainty. The slimy touch abandons possession in favor of trust.

Trust is only possible in a state between knowing and not-knowing. Trust means establishing a positive relationship with the Other, even in ignorance. It makes actions possible despite one’s lack of knowledge. If I know everything in advance, there is no need for trust. Transparency is a state in which all not-knowing is eliminated. Where transparency prevails, no room for trust exists.¹⁷³

For that reason, *the slimy touch* is also opaque. In absence of the supposed transparency given by the light of certainty and the truth-thirsty-eye, there is an interiority that remains mysterious even in close-contact. The fingers of the slimy body don’t dissect. In the *Gootopian* handshake – the gooey way of knowing - we tremble, we slide, we feel its weight, its wetness, its coldness. Our fingers glide with each other and, between them, the slime rests opaque, then showing up in translucent threads when we depart from each other.

These fingers don’t seek to solve the essence of this encounter. Édouard Glissant,¹⁷⁴ conceptualizes opacity as a right of opposing the reduction and homogenization of cultures and people under Western schemes that work through a demand of transparency. The right to opacity then, is the right the difference and yet to still be ungraspable. “If we examine the process of “understanding” people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to

¹⁷³ Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford University Press, 2015)., 47-48.

¹⁷⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce.¹⁷⁵

The hardening of the body makes its appearance again through Glissant's textural *languae*. To understand like this, to reduce like that, to objectify an-Other, one needs the graspable of the solid. Of what can be contained, separable, quantifiable. In other words, graspable. But the slimy fingers are driven by a desire of a relationality that is not frustrated in the absence of complete comprehension. These fingers don't reduce the Other to an object, they wander in wonder. Far from the immobility of totality. The right of opacity, writes Glissant, "is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components".¹⁷⁶

The opaque is not accessible by the principles of modern rationality and for that reason is not only discarded but attacked. This process of making the opaque transparent is also part of what I called previously the "hardening of the body". As Federici shows,¹⁷⁷ the Witch-hunting of the XVII century in Europe was a well-calculated deathly chase crucial for the establishment of capitalism. Here, one of the main processes that the historian points is the attack to magic:

The battle against magic has always accompanied the development of capitalism, to this very day. Magic is premised on the belief that the world is animated, unpredictable, and that there is a force in all things [...] Magic was also an obstacle to the rationalization of the work process, and a threat to the establishment of the principle of individual responsibility. Above all, magic

¹⁷⁵ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189-190.

¹⁷⁶ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

¹⁷⁷ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

seemed a for of refusal of work, of insubordination, and an instrument of grassroots resistance to power. The world had to be "disenchanted" in order to be dominated.¹⁷⁸

Disenchanted, the body is now made graspable and its ambiguity punished. Duden also shows how the body of woman and was thought to be magical and powerful because of the capacity to give birth. "The power of life and death was embodied above all by women in their capacity as "vessels of life and death" for this power was grounded in the ambiguity of their womb [...] From the seventeenth century on, a new, bureaucratic power was employed to destroy this cosmic anchoring of popular culture, to describe the female body, to interpret its ambiguous power as a demonic threat, and to explain its very nature as "natural" weakness".¹⁷⁹

What is important here is to understand the way in which the attack to opacity is also an attack to the ambiguous and part of solidifying the body. The closing and fencing of the body against the outside bring the image of a thick hard wall, not see-through. However, the attack to opacity reveals the need of transparency to control the ambiguous. Perhaps, this is the paradoxical enclosure that announces the modern type of surveillance.¹⁸⁰ The shift to this transparent hard wall is the shift to wanting to get rid of the excess and uncertainty of the ambiguous that the viscous materializes. The slimy body then would be a body that opposes the blinding categorization of the light of the modern reason. Of the eye that seeks-to-see-all.

The slimy body is also a body that loves pleasure. I think in the collective slimy dances of the workshop *Gootopians*. Hands reach towards other bodies. Both to move and stop. Perhaps getting dragged perhaps dragging someone else with them. Hands becomes places of constant re-orientation. Among all this gooeyness the distances between "you" and "me" become extremely slippery. They are of no use here, let them melt. With this blurriness comes

¹⁷⁸ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 173-174.

¹⁷⁹ Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, 8.

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

an expansion. The limits of what usually the body is get diffuse, the flesh of this body is now stretched. In this extension of the body, the hands also lose their place as the primary way of contacting. This dis-located body touches with all of its twisted surface. Music is loud. The floor is wet. Slug disco, Doris calls it. Slug orgy, I feel it.

Finding pleasure in unarticulated forms

The slimy body takes delight on abandoning the enclosure of the hardened body. Melting and drifting its walls, this body is open towards an-others. As Sara Ahmed writes, “pleasure also brings attention to surfaces, which surface as impressions through encounters with others. But the intensification of the surface has a very different effect in experiences of pleasure: the enjoyment of the other’s touch opens my body up, opens me up. [...] Pleasures open bodies to worlds through an opening up of the body to others”.¹⁸¹ Pleasure then, opens up the body as well as simultaneously needing an opening up of the body. In the hegemony of the solid, where the outside(r) is seen as a potential threat, transits between the inside and the outside are regulated.

The hardened body is reluctant of touching the texture of the other but is deeply intrigued by it. The slimy body, the Sartrean aberrant fluid, resonates with the way “queers have been constructed as abject bodies but also sources of desire and fascination”.¹⁸² The slimy knows this ambivalence from being the Sartrean aberrant fluid or a viscous dough in the imposing hands of the Bachelardian laborer. But the slimy body also knows itself porous, with its flesh as a membrane vibrating from the encounter, knowing as well that this openness is a vulnerable state that is constitutive at the same time as joyful. Its touch is not directed towards a specific goal but deeply invested in the encounter. Here, covered in gooeyness, the texture of the other is not anymore only others.

This pleasure involves too a game of resistances and tensions, where contact is not taken for granted, as the bodies constantly re-negotiate the intensities of their encounters. In their

¹⁸¹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 164.

¹⁸² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 162.

plasticity and malleability, slimy bodies shape-shift within this openness and change their consistencies depending on their desire. The viscous dance is a dance of lubricated frictions.

Pleasure involves an opening towards others; pleasure orientates bodies towards other bodies in a way that impresses on the surface, and creates surface tensions. But pleasure is not simply about any body opening up to any body. The contact is itself dependent on differences that already impress upon the surfaces of bodies. Pleasures are about the contact between bodies that are already shaped by past histories of contact¹⁸³

I now go back to the club for slugs. Beginning with the slimy hand massage, *Gootopia: the Treatment* extends an invitation to everyone attending to speculate together with the materiality of slime. In one part of the space, behind some long translucent curtains, blobs of slime await for those who want to get undressed and play with it. These curtains offer a space for a fragile intimacy shared between the strangers that, naked or in their underwear, become open to the pleasures of the slimy. Is an invitation to inhabit the wetness, to abandon the protection of the dry, to abandon the distance to get involved. The invitation to play-with is as well an invitation to dislocate the space of the scene of the performance. The now slimed bodies carry with them the traces of their recent encounter. They wander like slugs, leaving rather slime trails than biped tracks of feet. They look moist and happy. They must have found pleasure in unarticulated forms.

¹⁸³ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 165.

CONCLUSION

We are now *here*, in the end. Hopefully wet and slimy, after all. Writing the viscous body has felt like a big gooey blob falling in the ground: splattered, wide, playful, discombobulated, somehow messy and, many times, without expecting a pre-defined form of landing. But writing and reading the viscous is also to touch it, with fingers that get lost and adhered into it. Contrary to the solid body, the slimy body is not univocal. Its ambiguity makes it extremely open and tender to multiple interpretations that co-exist with each other. This is, starting from the end, the basis of the speculative approach that I proposed with the third chapter. Taking in a literal sense the meaning of *univocal*, the slimy body is not conformed by only *one-voice*, in a monologue. The slimy body is polyphonic and thrives in a collectivity of voices. I have chosen to show a multiplicity of ways on how a slimy corporeality could be imagined at the same time as theorized. That might have left the reader – you – but also the writer – me – with a desire of delving on the fingers a bit more, putting both hands in, or of plunging with the whole body on each one of them.

Among some of these paths that remain open after this research, now lying suggestively and tentatively, is the property of the viscous as existing in internal friction. The tension within the viscous and how to think the queer body and identity through them, unfolds as a topic that overflows the limitations of this research: it involves the necessity of a nuanced discussion on ethics that brings attention to the relation between frictions and freedom. On the negotiations of bodies between them and the spaces they inhabit, of the oppressive forces upon them, on how those “changes of consistencies” could function to envision ways of resistance and liberation against the annulation and unintelligibility of queer bodies - but not only.

In these pages I develop a queer analysis, through the category of gender, of what I have called an *ambiguphobic* thinking in western philosophies of body. However, the project of

theorizing a slimy phenomenology should take account of the dynamics of exclusion and Othering that render as abject not only the queer body, but also the brown body, the black body, the fat body, the migrant body, the crip body. A close attention to these dynamics through the viscous might as well reveal interesting ways of problematizing the tendency of their homogenization, allowing to see in the slimy a material complexity much more than an undifferentiated blob that would erase all differences and merge bodies and identities into One Single Entity. This, along with the existence-in-friction point to a bigger and exciting project of developing an ethics of slime through a materialist perspective.

The way we narrate the body takes also part on its shape, its possible limits, its perception and its lived experience too. Before I could speculate with what a slimy body could be like, I considered necessary to spend time touch-reading texts that speak and write the body in solid terms. This became a point of departure to start tracing the presence of viscosity as a material of phenomenology that, in their case, remains as a negative figure. This continued with a surprise when discovering the spectral place of the viscous within queer theory too, as lost in the folds of the solid/liquid binary. Condemned to that “in-between”, widely named yet barely materialized. I have attempted to narrate the viscous otherwise, hoping it can also open fruitful ways of narrating the body otherwise, embodying otherwise.

Some writing in this text is more liquid, other more viscous, others more solid. This has been also a writing-dance for me. Trying to “grasp” the viscous through the solidity of concepts and the dryness of certain theories might have taken me to fall into the liquid/solid binary, or to harden my voice at times. In others, perhaps writing the viscous more imaginatively, the writing has become more lubricated and perhaps even sensual, bringing joyful slimy moments. I have come to understand this difference of semiotic consistencies is also part of a text embodying its topic. But an important outcome of this work has also been, for me, as the person who writes, to rehearse un-learning ways of reading and writing theory that try to break with the dryness to

which academic writing has confined me many times. To have found those moments for another voice is also an vital gain of this research.

Lastly, the potential of the slimy for re-imagining ways of overflowing the hegemonic corporealities lies among the most exciting (in)conclusions of this research, unfolding also as a pleasurable surprise for myself in the developing of this work. The slimy, closely related to touch, brings attention to the ambivalences, ambiguities, and contradictions on the encounters between bodies. In these pages I have wished to tend a suggestive sliding path for finding ways towards a queer and viscous phenomenology that thinks and imagine with matter more pleasurable ways of making body.

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