

**[*GRAPE HEAD*: REJECTING COMPULSION/REPULSION THROUGH THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A QUEER TRANS DRAMATURGY]**

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Abstract

The following thesis tracks the creation, development and production of my thesis show *Grape Head*. At first, I will develop a queer dramaturgy that I plan on engaging with through my development period. This dramaturgy will be rooted in techniques that I will establish in the artistic challenge section of the thesis document. The techniques are based on research, observation and practice. I will contextualize these techniques, the ways they did or did not work, creating a final rendition of a personalized queer dramaturgical approach. Finally I will explore with the content and development of *Grape Head*.

Dedications:

For anyone who has felt that they were turning into a grape.

For the queer, trans and LGBTQIA2S+ fam in Toronto, Calgary, Rossland, online and beyond.

For our queer ancestors whose shoulders we stand on.

For Bean: the best dramaturg of all.

For Dionysus.

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My dear friends and family who mean the world to me.

The LGBTQIA2S+ community in Toronto, Calgary, Lethbridge, Rossland, online and beyond.

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Chapter One: Artistic Challenge

There Is No Time for Jokes¹

*“i wish i were two dogs, then i
could play with me”*

(Carson, *The Bakkhai*, 5)

A white-genderfluid-trans-nonbinary-bi/pansexual-gemini-cancer-cusp walks into a bar. They order a glass of wine (don't worry, this is not a joke: there is no time for jokes) when it arrives it is a dark red, like clotted blood.

A white-genderfluid-trans-nonbinary-bi/pansexual-gemini-cancer-cusp walks into a bar. When they panic, their therapist reminds them that they are allowed to change their mind. They are allowed to shift. To Grow. To flow. To be fluuuuiddddy about the academy, the world.

A white-genderfluid-trans-nonbinary-bi/pansexual-gemini-cancer-cusp walks into a bar. Except it isn't a bar. It's a thesis examination zoom room. An oral defense. Nobody really wants to be there but they are obligated. Most of them are performers, or have been at some point. They are good at pretending.

A white-genderfluid-trans-nonbinary-bi/pansexual-gemini-cancer-cusp walks into a bar. Their name is Eish but they are made to use their old name on their thesis paper because it is 'legal'. They cannot even include their name in the title. When they looked into changing it at York University so their degree matches their name, they sigh a tired sigh thinking about the barriers and bureaucracy of doing so when they see on the form it says:

“If you are not undertaking a legal name or gender change at this time, please indicate below so the Registrar can provide further information on how having a non-legal name

¹ There is always time for jokes.

on file may **impact you**. For more information on the process, visit the Student Personal Information page.” (currentstudents.york).

A white-genderfluid-trans-nonbinary-bi/pansexual-gemini-cancer-cusp walks into a bar. They order a glass of wine (don’t worry, this is not a joke: there is no time for jokes) when it arrives it is a dark red, like clotted blood. CORRECTION: due to COVID-19, they are not actually in a bar – they are in their basement suite in Tkaranto, ~~Toronto~~ on the traditional and current land of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. Metis region number 8. They are from Mohkínstsis, ~~Calgary~~, Treaty Seven Territory, Metis Region number 3.

Who I am is important but who I am not is also important. I bring certain things to my work, and I do not bring others. There will be holes, things lacking. Writing cannot be objective. An author cannot be separated from their work. I will strive to be reflective to my biases and the lenses that I see and experience the world through. As this paper ages, terms and phrases may change, as will the context in which the paper exists. My hope is that things can shift, change and morph, be relevant to a future time.

A large part of my research and creation work is contingent upon queer Black theorist, artist and activist adrienne maree brown’s book “*Pleasure Activism*”. I encountered this book in January 2020 and it has shifted the way I view my work, my relationships and the way I move through the world. I am grateful I encountered this book pre-pandemic.

Pleasure theory has risen from the work of Black activists and theorists. As a white queer artist and academic engaging with the ideas, methodologies and theories in brown’s book, it is crucial for me to be vigilant in my reflection and citation. This is especially crucial as I attempt to apply some of these theories to the creation of my own queer dramaturgy in performance.

There is a history of white folks co-opting and/or stealing the ideas of racialized scholars, artists and activists. This is something I have learned by following and listening to an array of Black, often queer, folks on Instagram and other online platforms. People like: Dr. Blay (@fiyawata), The Conscious Kid (@theconsciouskid), Munroe Bergdorf (@munroebergdorf), Miss. Peppermint (@peppermint247), Indya Moore (@indyamoore), Rachel Cargle (@rachel.cargle), Ericka Hart (@ihartericka), Tamika D Mallory (@tamikadmallory), Tarana Janeen (@taranajaneen), Sonya Renee Taylor (@sonyareneetaylor), The Nap Ministry (@thenapministry), adrienne mare brown (@adriennemareebrown) and others have spoken about the appropriation of Black ideas and culture by white people. The #citeblackwomen campaign proposes “5 guiding principles” to use to ensure that Black women receive proper space, recognition and citation within the academy. They also have a podcast where they speak about Black scholars’ experience in the academy. Their principles are as follows:

#1 - Read Black women's work

#2 - Integrate Black women into the CORE of your syllabus (in life & in the classroom).

#3 - Acknowledge Black women's intellectual production.

#4 - Make space for Black women to speak.

#5 - Give Black women the space and time to breathe. (citeblackwomencollective)

The queer community is not exempt from racism and upholds white supremacy in many ways. As Black, queer sex educator and activist Erick Hart writes “your queerness does not absolve your racism” (@erickahart June 4, 2020). As white folks in the queer community, we must take action to challenge/change dominant systems of supremacy by supporting the work of those who are racialized and doing our own work. Anti-racism and the internal work that us white folks need to do is intrinsic to queerness. Climate Justice Toronto speaks to this in a post

on their instagram pages, saying “not gay as in happy, queer as in abolish the police” (@climatejusticeto June 27). White, trans, anti-zionist Jewish artist Micha Bazant also spoke to the political nature of queerness on their painting celebrating Black trans and queer activist Marsha P. Johnson (who was at the forefront the Stonewell Riots). On the painting above Marsha’s image they wrote “No pride for some of us without liberation for all” (Bazant).

Us white queers have benefitted from the work done by Black, Indigenous and other People of Color and we must step up to the fight to achieve liberation/freedom for all of us.

The queer community is huge, vast and varying. Queerness is made up of accepting and celebrating both difference and sameness, and though identification to the queer community is incredibly important, queerness as a political mindset is not just an identity. It is something you do. It is active. It takes work. An intrinsic part of queerness is subverting/challenging the dominant systems: showing up, supporting movements and fighting alongside the community. This is something I have learned through community online and in person. Where queer is defined as “strange” (google) to queer is “to make strange”. The dramaturgy that I use to develop my solo show will aim to stay aware of its queer roots, staying reflective and vigilant in its citation practice while also striving to personalize.

Before I Knew Them, I Knew Them

*“Beginnings are special
because most of them are fake.
The person you become
with that first sip of wine
was already there.” (Carson 6)*

I was born slowly. Not all at once. People want there to be a moment. Expect there to be a moment. When I came out. When I knew. Straightforward. Simple. A desire for simplicity. To

understand. But I was born slowly. Over time. There were many moments. Many, many moments. How can you solidify a fluid? Queer folks are forced to come out many times, and in my experience, coming out feels inaccurate. It's like stepping in. Coming in. To self. To actualization.

“There are many ways to come out. Sometimes the label comes first. Sometimes it's through action or experience. Some people say they've always known, and for others the process of realization is gradual. It might not be a single big moment, but an accumulation of many little ones” (Samra Habib, *We have always been here* 125).

This is my experience for my sexuality and my gender. My transness. Due to my geographical location and the socio-political conservative environment in Calgary, Alberta where I grew up, it took me a while to figure it out. But who I am was always there. I have always been bi/pansexual. I have always been genderfluid-trans-nonbinary. Even before I told anyone. Before I had the language for it myself. “Before I knew them, I knew them. Inside outside, outside inside.” (Van Wieren, *Grape Head*).

My challenge is to develop a personalized queer dramaturgy and development practice while creating *Grape Head*; my new solo show. This dramaturgy will be rooted in techniques inspired from research and performance work; my own and others. It will then be put into practice in the studio, my writing, rehearsals and staging of *Grape Head*. It is my hope that this approach can be used on future projects by myself and others. I will end with several additional challenges: staying rooted in practice rather than theory, dealing with the effects of COVID-19 and finally to shape my work based on the methodology laid out in this paper.

Ultimately, I am trying to create an explicitly queer dramaturgical and decision making process to reshape the development of my current and future theatrical works, the spaces I work in and my decision making processes in art-making. I hope that this dramaturgy will act as a catalyst to shift the inner compulsion/repulsion paradigm that I feel as a queer/trans artist working in interconnected systems of oppression using processes I oppose.

Repulsion/Compulsion and Queer Dramaturgy

“Exhaustion should be still, spent, gently beckoning sleep – or better yet just clocking out. Instead it is churning inside me with unwelcome vigour. I know, I know, it is more than fatigue that is tugging at me” (Ekwuyasi 24)

As a queer, trans, intersectional feminist artist, I admit that I often fall into the trap of judging my work/art by the standards of normative and dominating European systems of storytelling or ways of working in a capitalist arts world. These are ways of working that were pushed on me in primary, secondary and post-secondary school as “the right way of working” or “the only way to tell stories”. In the past, this has resulted in me making sacrifices to either fit within the systems I oppose, or resist them unintentionally. It has led me to avoid working in theatres or spaces that I feel unwelcome in, whilst feeling an impulse that my work and career won’t be valid unless I am in these spaces that I do not wish to be in. Thus, I try to work in those spaces only to leave again, making me feel - at times - that my relationship with theatre is toxic and draining.

I have defined this for myself as a compulsion/repulsion paradigm in which I feel compelled to work in ways or spaces that repulse me. This is not an isolated experience or one that only I am experiencing. I have had off hand conversations with other queer and trans artists over the years in workshops, bars, coffee shops, who have expressed similar sentiments and had similar experiences.

These systems are so vast and so imbedded in us, that even as we try to resist them, we feel compelled to operate within them. This affects us at many levels including the ways in which we create our art, run teams, or tell stories.

Some examples of these insidious systems that we are forced to live, work and participate in, are large and dominating like capitalism, colonialism, white-supremacist structures, trans/queerphobia, heteronormativity, racism, etc. On a smaller level, examples of these systems in dominant ideas around storytelling include the three/five act structure, linear narratives, character building, larger theatre/arts companies, genre, output, etc.

While at York I had the pleasure of taking two directing classes with Canadian director, educator and artist Peter Hinton-Davies. He often reminded me when I critiqued imposing creative systems, such as the structure or genre wheel, that the five-act structure is not a requirement or something you must strive to fit into but rather a tool, easily manipulated by the storyteller to use how they want. This was a refreshing insight and reminder, especially after being taught for years in my undergrad some of these tools are the only ‘proper’ ways to tell a story. It is, however, difficult for me to not consider these tools ones that aid in maintaining the hegemonies (such as patriarchy, queer/transphobia misogyny, white supremacy) by telling narratives in a formulaic way. I agree that using the tools that we are taught and manipulating them to serve us can be useful, especially at times more so than unintentionally rejecting them as I have done in the past. However, rather than focusing on critiquing these tools or altering them, I have decided to seek a new frame to work within, one that I can intentionally insert into my work in order to disrupt the repulsion/compulsion that I feel.

Enter queer dramaturgy. Queer dramaturgy provides an opportunity to intentionally craft and shape a theatrical work/performance while manipulating and challenging dominant structures. It

uses practice and theory to develop work. As Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier say in their book *Queer International Dramaturgies*:

“if queer is still, as David Halperin asserted early in its articulation, ‘by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’, then queer dramaturgies are likewise set against the dominant modes of representation and are shaped through forms that are on the fringe and boundaries of disciplines.” (Campbell and Farrier 7).

Campbell and Farrier speak about “Where Performance Leads Queer” using performance as the main mode of analysis in order to feel queer dramaturgy as an embodied experience for performers and audiences (4). While pointing to the interdisciplinary nature of queer performance, they also indicate that there are other important considerations into what makes a dramaturgy queer such as “the venue, the content of the performance, the communities where the performance takes place, the identificatory processes that are stimulated (or not) and, . . . the specific temporal and geographical locality in which the work takes place” (8). This key nature of the queer and queering is essential to acknowledge and remember, as it keeps us reflective on queer as an identity, but also something active, changing, contextual. We must remind ourselves, especially when addressing the dominance of US/UK narratives in queer performance that “a study of queer dramaturgy that has international dimensions . . . sees that that which is radically queer in one context can be less so in another.” (8)

Since queer dramaturgies challenge dominant narratives, and queer communities have their own dominances centering homonormativity, white, anglo, and cisgender (usually cismale) voices in queer scholarship and stories told on stage (5), queer dramaturgies must also challenge these contextually dominant narratives. Homonormativity is defined by Lisa Duggan as “a politic

that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them (where) ‘gay theatre’ might focus on recognisably gay stories and characters, but perhaps within a character/plot-based form that asks for empathy from a mainstream audience, and without drawing attention to the theatrical act as a construct, or questioning the idea of coherence of ‘character’” (Campbell and Farrier 13). We could say that these homonormative narratives play into dominant systems to appeal to masses – something that in some contexts or time periods may have been needed.

Queer Dramaturgy for *Grape Head*

*“What would I be doing with my time if I made
decisions based on a deep, erotic, orgasmic yes?”*

(adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism*, 23)

This question from adrienne maree brown’s *Pleasure Activism* guides my dramaturgy. I ask it as I make decisions, create content, structure the work and find collaborators. It has been a deeply grounding question to return to whilst working on developing my thesis and show. I yearn to create a practice that embodies a “deep, erotic, orgasmic yes” (23). I want the choices that shape the work to come from this place of deep erotic pleasure. If there is no deep erotic yes, then this will give me a clue as an artist whether to move away from a choice or to sit with it longer and morph it until it moves to this place. As brown states “we become what we practice” (10) and developing a show is the perfect time to work with this important question so that the final play is saturated in joy and pleasure at every joint. I want *Grape Head*, in its final stages, to be soaked in pleasure, as if the final product was dipped into a vat of sweet ice wine; as brown states “when I am happy it is good for the world.” (10);

This does not mean that there is no room for no. In fact as brown states – “your no makes way for a yes” (amb 14) meaning that we should be able to say no until there is room for a pleasurable yes.

adrienne maree brown defines pleasure as “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment” (brown 13) and pleasure activism as “the work we do to reclaim our whole happy and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” (brown 9), and that this means *prioritizing* the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression (9). She asserts that “we all need and deserve pleasure” (9), and that pleasure activism is not about excess but rather tapping into the natural abundance within us and the planet’s resources so that we all have enough (11). It requires us asking ourselves “what is enough?”:

Pleasure activism is about learning what it means to be satisfiable, generate, from within and from between us, an abundance from which we can all have enough . . . so rather than encouraging moderation over and over, I want to ask you to relinquish your own longing for excess and to stay mindful of your relationship to enough. How much sex would be enough? How high would be high enough? How much love would feel like enough? Can you imagine being healed enough? Happy enough? Connected enough? Having enough space in your life to actually live it? Can you imagine being free enough? Do you understand that you, as you are, is enough?
(brown 11-12)

This question put forward by adrienne maree brown is a question that I want to soak my piece in to ask not only during the creation/development period but to be asked by the piece itself. It is a question I will ask myself along the way when I feel what I offer to my work and the world with my art and techniques are not enough. When I feel I am not queer enough, nonbinary enough,

fluid enough, trans enough, creative enough, I will come back to this question and attempt to answer it through movement, pleasure and sensation in the body, knowing that wherever I arrive in my work will be enough. I want to create abundance through the development of this piece and future works, not only for myself but for my creative team and the community I am part of. I want to shape the work by using the tools and materials I have, creating the work from a place of enough, while still pushing myself artistically. It is important for me to work with queer and trans artists and prioritize our pleasure and wellbeing while working on projects.

It is important to note that “*Pleasure Activism*” prioritizes the pleasure and experience of Black women. Much of pleasure theory comes from Black authors and scholars such as Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, Toni Cade Bambara and others (15-17). It is important for me to reiterate as a white author using this theory to help develop a dramaturgy, that I must be reflective on the fact that colonial white supremacy, one of the most oppressive and destructive systems on the planet, is a system that I have benefitted from and participated in as a white person. Historically our concept of pleasure as white folks has not been pleasure at all, but rather excess. Excess causing exceptional, irrevocable harm: hoarding of resources, over extraction, colonialism, capitalism, treating human beings as expendable resources, patriarchy, racist systems and white supremacy:

“part of the reason so few of us have a healthy relationship with pleasure is because a small minority of our species hoards the excess of resources, creating a false scarcity and then trying to sell us joy, sell us back to ourselves...on this broad level, white people and men have been the primary recipients of this delusion, the belief that they deserve to have excess while the majority of others don’t have enough...or further, that the majority of the world exists in some way to please them” (11).

I see this misunderstanding of pleasure on Google Dictionary where it is defined as “enjoyment and entertainment, contrasted with things done out of necessity”, “an event or activity from which one derives enjoyment” and “sensual gratification” (Google dictionary). It is strange yet fitting in a capitalist world where we are taught that work is the biggest priority over all else, that this definition of pleasure includes “things done out of necessity”, rather than being entwined in wellbeing and necessity. Pleasure is seen as an add on, something additional to our lives distracting us from what is important rather than being entwined in our wellbeing.

A key distinction that I want to make for myself as I work on my show is differentiating pleasure and distraction (ultimately pain) from one another. In doing so I hope to find the balance between moderation and excess. A question that arises for me is at what point does something pleasurable become something that distracts? What is it distracting from? Pleasure as brown defines it, is about becoming more present, bringing us into the present moment and allowing us to experience life in a more full way. Distraction brings us out of the present moment and somewhere else – be it past, present or future. Distraction can feed into our need for excess and thus negating the pleasure principles.

Mask Making

Building masks and using those masks in the studio to create theatre is, and has been, key to my artistic practice for almost 7 years. The process of building the masks, which are both visual art pieces and costume design, is significant. It is a ritualistic, private show for my cat or whoever happens to be around. Items that might be considered garbage or recycling by some, are crafted into something new, with love, care and time. They are imbued with importance, joy, focus, energy. They are then given life on stage through the body. This process is pleasurable.

I am a maker. A builder. I create things with my hands, bring them to life and transform them into performance. Building masks is a meditation. Performing with them, a ritual. Often I forget that this is where I create from. And then I remember. Then I forget again. It is a cyclical process. I get caught up in the way I expect myself to work – the repulsion, compulsion paradigm. There is a joy in the remembering and a deep sorrow in the forgetting.

Now that I remember I will try not to forget again. Building new masks has enriched both my process and the show. It is how I always want to be spending my time. Sometimes I avoid it because I think I should be doing something else even though this is the process. It brings me a sense of calm, pleasure and deep satisfaction to build.

Technique

I am a self-taught visual artist and mask maker. This means that I am most often learning by trial and error or from tips from other makers in the community. I have something in my head - an image - and I try to bring it to life as a three dimensional object. Sometimes I will draw a sketch, but often I let the materials speak for themselves; show me what they want to be.

The masks that I make would not necessarily be considered traditional *Commedia dell'Arte* character masks or Larval training masks from the Leqoc's school. Fundamentally, my practice takes inspiration from, and is in conversation with, nature as a generative space of possibility, which continuously inspires me to give life to magical, human-like monsters – bodies that stretch, grow, and oscillate wildly – while also informing my writing. These creations attempt to capture and confront my own body dysmorphia and transform it into wondrous, haunting beings and stories that are animated by joyousness. I have found however, that making a beautiful mask is different than making a mask that is also functional for theatre performance.

All of the masks that I make must be able to be worn securely for long periods of time, breathable and able to be seen through, at least a little bit.

Some materials that I have used to create masks include paper mache with flour, modge podge - suggested by director and theatre creator Jay Northcott, mache clay, cardboard, duct tape, fabric and plaster - suggested by creator and performer Becca Jean. Each material and method has its pros and cons. There is something empowering in using found materials to build masks. Though the techniques may appear juvenile or basic, they are in fact durable, cheap, sustainable and effective. In the future I wish to expand upon my techniques and materials with which I work.

Play and exploration

Most of my formal mask training has been in theatrical half mask where you are able to express and speak. This has presented a challenge as lately I am almost exclusively building full masks. Full masks require heightened body expressions and sounds/silence to bring the mask to life rather than speaking. Therefore, I feel at times that my physical performance training is lacking, no matter how much I experiment with video, mirrors or outside eyes to find the body and movement of the masks in order to best bring them to life. The masks are silent, as full masks generally are, occasionally using only sound to communicate. With *Grape Head* I experimented with having Ampelos, the main character, speak with a nylon mask on, and it did not read the way I intended. The voice felt disconnected from the body of the character, disjointed and detached.

I attended a workshop in Feb 2021 with Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett, hosted online by the McNally Robinson Association in Manitoba. I was struck not only by his incredibly charming personality and nuanced perspectives on theatre and puppetry, but also by

his thoughts on his own dramaturgical practice. Burkett talked about how through most of his career he developed his plays by starting with the script first, and then building the puppets to fit the script. Now, however, because of COVID-19 and the possibility of losing his puppet workshop, he has changed his dramaturgical approach and will instead build as many puppets as possible first, then create scripts with the puppets made. The way he described his process of creation made me realize that it can be important to be intentional about whether you begin a new work with a script or an object (puppet/mask) first. *Grape Head* has been unintentionally a bit of both, with the script and masks being built hand in hand. In the future I wish to be more intentional about how I dramaturg and craft theatre; whether it be one of those three ways.

Queer Aesthetics: Visual Composition and Object Manipulation

As a transdisciplinary artist visual composition – color, stage picture, images, costumes, aesthetics - is integral to my dramaturgical process and development practice. From witnessing queer drag/gendered performers, models, burlesque shows and fashion over the years, I have observed that all particularly focus on the visual with color and aesthetics being crucial to the work. As I work on *Grape Head* I am challenging myself to think about it not only as a performance, but also as a painting. How am I using my body, costumes, masks, colors, objects/props, to create a visual experience on stage? This specifically relates not only to the composition of the stage picture, but also how, as the performer, I interact with and use the props and masks that I have on stage; the specificity of physicalization with the masks I use and the character revelation that can come from covering up my face. It is interesting to consider this at a time when people are wearing masks on a daily basis. How do we find gender and sexual freedom through mask? How does it expose us in a way that we are not exposed to without the mask? How does the body/character interact with objects: real, fake, inanimate, animate?

An example of a queer artist who uses mask and works to create deeply aesthetic and visual work is Calgary based interdisciplinary visual artist Khyrsta Lloren. Known more commonly in the queer community by the name NOFAC₃ (@nofac3.binch) a character created in 2018 “prompted by their growing desire to ‘do a type of drag, but through mask rather than makeup, as a means to tell stories of the queer community without fear of retribution” (lumaquarterly). Through NOFAC₃ Lloren indicated that they “found freedom in anonymity” using themselves as “a vessel or platform to record and showcase (the Calgary queer community) through (their) own aesthetic lens” (lumaquarterly). Some distinctly queer aesthetic choices used by NOFAC₃ are camp, crassness, horror, soft colored hues and bisexual lighting – “a semi-recent phenomenon where purple, pink, and blue toned hues light a scene, as a means to reference the bisexual flag or denote a character’s bisexuality” (lumaquarterly). Their awe inspiring masks, costumes and set pieces, illustrate the precision with which NOFAC₃ and their incredibly unique visual eye use to create work that merges performance and visual art.

Fluidity of Character, Body and Movement

As someone who is genderfluid-trans-nonbinary and bi/pan, I often feel a demand in my day to day - from being misgendered at the grocery store or chiropractor, to being forced to use my legal name on a rental application (or on my thesis paper), to having to continually come out to people on contract jobs - to create a static identity that fits within the normalized binary: straight, gay, man, woman. Fluidity need not be presented as being in opposition to stability, as Erin Calhoun Davis states, “stable/fluid, hegemonic/subversive, and oppression/empowerment” need not be pitted against one another as dichotomies (Davis 3), thus existing together. We can find stability within our fluidity, our morphing sexual and gender identities. As Alok Menon said in their video for Utah Trans Pride, “when we understand that language, like people, shifts,

grows, and changes we are able to create/develop language that communicates our internal worlds clearer and with more specificity” (Menon). This can be reflected in an array of pronouns and terms that give more specificity in naming folks’ identities.

I plan to use fluidity of character within a narrative as a dramaturgical technique. The cohesion demanded by us in the world, is reflected within narrative structures that attempt to fix characters in time and place by demanding consistency (Campbell and Farrier 13). Queer dramaturgy questions this notion and in doing so challenges the “logic, connection, congruity and consistency” (13) that is normally demanded in a theatrical work. This queer dramaturgical approach seeks “forms that do not fix character (or) time and place in the way most realism or mimetic theatre does” (15) and moves away from “homonormativity and neoliberal focus on the subject and psychological realism” (13) allowing a shift from a linear development. This is a tool used within feminist and post-dramatic theatre (16).

This queer dramaturgical technique pays mind to the performer, the body laboring, “in an attempt to close the gap between performer/character” where both the “virtual (absent, referenced) character being presented and the solid present, socially impactful performers body”(16) are present on stage in a way that merges the fiction and the real. The character is the performer is the character. They flow between one another thus challenging a hierarchy generally present in realism that suggests, “that what is represented (the ‘real’ world) – and thus absent – is more important than what is present (a world created on stage with real bodies and objective, often in a fictive scenario)”(16). This technique gives power to the fictive, and asks us to see the ‘non real’ with equal importance to the ‘real’. Finding moments of queer sexuality and gender expression is also important for the performer/character fluidity – and in *Grape Head* where self becomes lover becomes deity.

Grape Head is imbued with fluidity in its development both in content and form. The character, Ampelos, is constantly morphing, literally transforming, into something new. They flow in and out of being a grape, at times fully transformed and at others partially, moving away from a logical and linear progression. Where does Eish, the performer, become Ampelos, the character, and Ampelos become Eish? As the performer and character share the same body, to tell stories – some real experiences, some fictive – all written by the performer, the lines blur between truth and fiction.

In the summer of 2020 I attended the Margolis Method training program online (due to COVID) with Kari Margolis, movement and theatre creator based out of New York state. During the training, Kari spoke about the history of objects as they move through a space. When we work with them as actors, we carry the history within the object, and thus come to know that history of the object. This translates as well to movement: what is the history of a character's movement and how can that be present in our performance? Kari spoke about how intention, clarity of focus and use of energy can help with this. She also mentioned how the complexity of a history within an object makes it sacred. This made me think that if we challenge the history an object contains through our creation and performance, we can queer this dramaturgy.

I was hoping we would work more on specificity with movement and objects in order that I could apply the work to my mask explorations. Unfortunately, this part of the workshop was very brief, however the techniques could still be applied.

Performance Space

Along with fluidity of character, another queer dramaturgical element is the fluid play in the performance space, environment and subcultural space of the club or the live art venue

(Campbell and Farrier 14). This can involve questioning the frame of the piece, allowing for fluid interaction between the audience as well as aesthetic choices made in the audience's participation or immersion.

One example of a form that embodies this fluidity is cabaret, often used within queer theatres, it allows ensembles to break conventions established by the fourth wall. In *Kabaret* by Warlikowski performed and created in Poland, cabaret was used as tool for the ensemble to “engage in carnivalesque as a means of providing a space for self determination that promoted personal contact with the audience” (Lease 42). The use of a “specific form of cabaret from Weimar Berlin was a proactive tool to embody scathing anti normative critiques of the alt-right movements that merged art with power, magnifying new forms of extremism and their means of justification” (42).

This technique is one that *Grape Head* will attempt to embody as I clarify where the show will be done and how/when the fourth wall will be broken, where the character speaks directly to members of the audience. Covid-19 will likely lead to a small intimate audience where there may be fear of any kind of connection. I am excited to see how I can play with the fluidity of the venue and performance and let it inform the creation of my work.

Access to Audience and Space During A Global Pandemic

Playing with space has been difficult when working during COVID-19 as almost all of my studio time was cancelled, and no audiences have been allowed in. This has caused fluidity in a different way - an adapting way - to figure out how to effectively use my work space at home, and in sharing work online. It is something that I am familiar with and have done before working on this piece. Unfortunately, at times it felt like adapting out of necessity rather than for the art. Ultimately due to COVID my workshop was planned to be done without an

audience present and filmed to be shown at a later date. However, due to further COVID restrictions and a major health risk in Toronto, the workshop ended up being adapted to focus on developing the play further with a recorded reading to be embedded within an accompanying zine of images.

Queer Personal Accounts

Another vital queer dramaturgical technique is the power of telling personal experiences/stories onstage to reveal and challenge oppressive forces and dominant narratives within a society. This tool is consistent with feminist theatre and performance as well as other kinds of theatre.

This technique is an important convergence of fluidity of character and the merging of the character and performer. In December 2020, I took a week long intensive workshop with Canadian playwright Carmen Aguirre through Playwrights Workshop Montreal. This workshop was called “Making the Personal Political” and focused on using personal experience to critique larger political climates, using your personal experiences to help people enter a story. Carmen Aguirre spoke about how to do this in a way that doesn’t become over indulgent, or one-sided in perspective. Though certain bodies are inherently political in our world, she spoke about how it is also important to be specific and intentional about what you are trying to do with your work and how to shape a story. The personal is an entry point for political work – something that York University professor and supervisor Erika Batdorf also spoke of in our performance creation classes.

This technique allows for people who may have similar or differing politics than you, to enter the work and challenge their ways of thinking. Aguirre specified the importance of themes and counter themes in playwriting and how essential it is to give your character a fatal flaw so

they can become relatable. Her overarching point in the workshop was how can you make people who have opposite politics from you stay in their seats and actually listen to your story without them realizing you are also pushing your politics.

Disidentification, a term coined by queer theorist José Muñoz, is a process that is “descriptive of ‘the strategies a minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously eludes or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship’” (Lease 44). Through disidentification, a minority subject is able to disidentify with the normative society, learn what they are not, and in doing so find identity and ways of being in other communities. Victor Turner coined the use of disidentification to create new spaces and identities as creating “*communitas*” (44). Unification with the audience was created in “*Kabaret*” by Warlikowski in Poland through the physical relationship with the audience. This was established with eye contact, physical touch, sharing a joint, concurrent use of audience seating/performance space to create mutual co-presence between audience/spectator that was temporal, affecting and inclusive (44). This technique is used within theatre and coined by Jill Dolan as “utopian performance” or “the moments in a theatre event or a ritual in which audience or participants feel themselves becoming part of the whole, inciting belonging in the group” (44). This technique is used within queer theatre as a tool to create a sense of community, unification and a belonging for minority identities by creating queer utopia on stage.

Carmen Maria Machado critiques the concept of queer utopia by speaking about the need for a larger range of representation of queer folks and marginalized communities in media. This is important so that people do not feel that they need to be part of a utopic community only to face violence, abuse and other problems within community. “Maybe this will change someday.

Maybe, when queerness is so normal and accepted that finding it will feel less like entering paradise and more like the claiming of your own body: imperfect, but yours” (Machado 109).

In her memoir *In the Dream House* about abuse in a lesbian relationship she speaks about the problem with the queer characters being villainized in media and the importance of representing many sides of queer community on stage, screen and on page rather than in only one way:

“As it turns out, queer villains become far more interesting among *other* gay characters, both within a specific project or universe and the zeitgeist at large. They become one star in a larger constellation; they are put in context. And that’s pretty exciting, even liberating; by expanding representation, we give space to queers to be – as characters, as real people – human beings. They don’t have to be metaphors for wickedness and depravity or icons of conformity and docility. They can be *what they are*. We deserve to have our wrongdoing represented as much as our heroism, because when we refuse wrongdoing as a possibility for a group of people, we refuse their humanity. That is to say, queers – real-life ones – do not deserve representation, protection and rights because they are morally pure or upright as a people. They deserve those things because they are human beings, and that is enough.” (Machado 47).

Non-linearity and Poetics

As a writer I lean towards poetics. I am inspired by poets such as Anne Carson who uses poetry as a way to see the world clearer. In playwriting, this allows audiences to see the characters’ inner and outer worlds more astutely. This is a tool that Indigenous playwright Yolanda Bonnell spoke about using in their own writing when she came into our performance creation class.

I have however found it challenging at times to find ways to still bring the audience along on the journey without isolating them. Lately I have been focussed on building a world and breaking it apart bit by bit. I have been looking to the Greek play *The Bakkhai* (or *Bacchae*) by Euripides – a play where Dionysus appears to a town that lost faith in him, and causes chaos amongst the non-believers. I contemplate what would happen if the story were to be flipped so that the liberation happens near the end of the play through the freedom of Bacchae.

My goal is to not fall into the trap of a linear story through the use of poetics, while still bringing the audience on a clear and specific journey. Using particular themes in my writing to help guide the narrative may be an effective way to do this and was a writing tool that Carmen Aguirre suggested when I took her playwriting course through Playwrights' Worksop Montreal. For example: the transformation theme of *Ampelos* is that they start living in a world of pain/death and move into pleasure/birth. This will help me get specific in my writing to create the “arc” of the show.

COVID-19

The pandemic has created some obvious and some not so obvious challenges for me as a creator. Space, resources, audience, community, focus, mental health, distraction and pain are at the forefront of these challenges. I hope to use challenges such as not being able to gather, not having access to similar resources, etc. as a way to learn new things about the show and my own process. I plan to adapt as needed and will attempt to track how and what I learn as I do so. It is also a great time to study masks and masking in the world.

The immense amount of pain and distraction right now may actually help me to become incredibly specific when analyzing pleasure as a dramaturgical resource and the ways in which it

can be distinguished from pain/distraction. Though I was determined to stage the play and get a video recording to share online, due to COVID I was forced to do my workshop online and transition the show to an audio reading with a focus on dramaturgy. I have decided that I will create a digital zine with images of my costumes and masks designed for the show along with play text and accompanying links to each scene's audio. It will allow me to create two different ways for an audience to listen to the show: either piece by piece in the suggested order, or as a singular work in the order as is. Since my own focus has been drastically affected by COVID-19, I hope that the flexibility of listening to short segments will create accessibility to the show.

Chapter Two: Performance Research Document

Dionysos is god

of the beginning

before the beginning.

(Carson pg 5 The Bakkhai)

Grape Head is a solo show that tells the story of Ampelos; a white genderfluid-trans-nonbinary bi/pansexual, obsessed with fermentation and Dionysus, who discovers they are metamorphosizing into a grape. With the world as they knew it changed, Ampelos must navigate their chaotic fall into self-understanding, as they are reborn through queer transformation - all the while making a vat of wine to offer to Dionysus.

Grape Head is a coming out story, meets Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, meets a reversed version of *The Bacchae*. Dionysus is re-imagined as a genderfluid-trans-nonbinary Gox (gender neutral term for deity) that Ampelos both worships, loves and becomes; as self becomes lover becomes deity. Using poetic language and vivid imagery, *Grape Head* explores things in life and nature that, though not seen with the eye, are revealed to have always been there. Using original

masks, music, vibrant colors, text and movement, this Kafkaesque story poetically splices personal accounts of queer transformation with ancient Greek mythology to re-imagine and bring forth the queerness of Dionysus.

The piece starts with a glimpse into the love story of Ampelos and Dionysus, rewriting the myth with queer/trans characters. We then move to contemporary Toronto, where we find human Ampelos biking. They are on a quest to get ingredients and make a vat of wine as an offering for Dionysus. The wine making grounds Ampelos' needs into actionable tasks and is used as a structuring device in the piece; "The Plucking", "The Crushing" and "The Pouring" become ritualistic tasks performed over the course of the play. Ampelos must figure out how to accept parts of themselves and move away from the anxiety, pain and fear they have been holding onto. As Ampelos becomes more in touch with who they really are, the world as they knew it slips away and they fall into the world of *Grape Head*, a cosmic, cerebral world of pleasure, self-actualization and birth of self.

The show explores the boundless, transient and rough edges of Ampelos as they grapple with the duality of queer love/loss, pleasure/pain, birth/death and self, with ecstatic frenzy. As lover becomes self becomes deity, hierarchies between the real and the fake are lateralized and time loses linearity. Through striking poetic candor, past, present and future are merged as the audience is invited into Ampelos' inner world and imagistic past, present and future. The piece also briefly touches on the privileges of Ampelos as a white queer with a relatively supportive family to whom they struggle to come out. The play is about things that are not always seen or felt right away, but are revealed to have always been there. Sometimes positive things, sometimes negative, sometimes a bit of both or neither.

The story for *Grape Head* is a metaphor for my queerness and coming out as genderfluid trans-nonbinary. As I have been working on this piece, I have been in the process of coming out to myself, my friends and family as trans. This story is a depiction of how I have felt my whole life and coming into self-acceptance with transformation. Often in the past when I have looked in the mirror I have not seen myself reflected back. I feel like I see a different person staring at me. I have found myself confused by the way people have responded to me based on whatever gender they perceive me to be rather than who I have been throughout my whole life. I have been drawn to Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis* since I read it at age 18. When I read about Gregor Samsa waking up as a monstrous insect, I felt seen. I thought – "This is me. I am Gregor Samsa. Gregor Samsa is me". *The Metamorphosis* spoke to something deep inside me that I could not articulate or understand but had always felt. "Before I knew them I knew them. Inside, outside, outside inside" (Van Wieren *Grape Head*). This comes from a place of joy, love and interest. To wake up and be someone else, something else, is miraculous. It is funny. It is confusing. It is dysmorphic. It is lovely. I would not change who I am for anything. I am in constant transition and yet have found stability within that. The show ultimately came to me when I put a purple stocking over my head and thought "wow, I look like a grape".

Metamorphosis and fermentation are obvious examples of transformation in nature. The changing of a living organism from one thing to another happens all the time. Fermentation is a specific process. It is simple, yet complicated. For me, it is a vivid metaphor for queerness. Wine making is especially precise. Each ingredient you add changes the recipe and the outcome. You need time. You have to wait. The result is worth it and you already had it there to begin with.

Wine is general, and yet it is incredibly specific. At first it seems there are only reds and whites. Those can each be broken into numerous kinds and types, depending on grapes used,

process and region. However, look closer and there are way more categories of wine: ice wines, rosé, champagne, sparkling, mulled wine, etc. Wine moves beyond the binary. The differences between two kinds of the same wine, like sauvignon blanc, is vast. Yet wine is made out of the same thing. This is reflected within the queer community in our incredibly varied gender identities and sexualities, though we are often all grouped together as one. There is a sameness, or generality, and also specificity, variance and difference with the ultimate goal of acceptance at the crux.

Wine ties into pleasure theory, Dionysus and ritual. It is easy to over indulge in alcohol, and yet, in moderation it can be a highly enjoyable and medicinal substance. In ancient Greece, and in fact many religions, wine was (and still is) holy. It was a way to alter your state of consciousness and become in touch with a higher state of being or power. The bacchae, or those that worshipped Dionysus, indulged in wine and altered states of being. As the God of wine Dionysus was associated with grapes, vines and, of course, wine. (theoi)

Depictions of Dionysus in mythology make them a Gox representing queerness, partying, madness, frenzy, chaos and theatre (Siobhan). Dionysus was raised as a girl, and often flitted between genders (rebus.press). They were also known to have sex with many different genders. I believe that the fluid that represents them - that they create - is a symbol of their own fluidity. This makes them a wonderful choice for a queer enby who is becoming up as grape to worship Dionysus.

One queer story of Dionysus is about them and Ampelos. In the original myth when reading Theoi (an online data base for Greek myth), Dionysus is referred to by he pronouns, as was Ampelos. There are two slightly different versions of this tale but the one that I referenced

most while working on the show is from Nonnus. In this myth Ampelos was a young satyr – he was born from a nymph mother and a satyr father – and he and Dionysus were queer lovers. While Ampelos was riding the back of a bull, he boasted that he was the best at driving cattle since he had horns of his own. Selene (goddess of the moon) made the bull he was riding throw him off and gorge him to death. Dionysus was upset about the death of his loved Ampelos and so transformed him into the first grape vine only to make wine from his blood (mrvopone, theoi). Ampelos, translated, means vine (Theoi).

Upon encountering this myth I found it incredibly intriguing and directly connected it to what I was working on. When I decided to name my main character Ampelos and rewrite the myth, I began asking questions such as: Is this character Dionysus' lover? What does it mean for them to drink wine as a grape, or as a person – the thing they are made of? How is Ampelos connected to Dionysus? Are Ampelos and Dionysus one and the same? In *Grape Head*, these questions are taken into consideration. Ampelos' relationship with Dionysus mirrors both lovers of the myth, their own life and their relationship with holiness and worship.

Other central images to *Grape Head* include vines, snakes and the twisting, twining, climbing motion of both. These symbols are connected to Dionysus as they are associated with both vines and snakes depicted carrying a thyrsus with a snake wrapped around it – symbolism that is associated with Dionysus (theoi). I became obsessed with watching vines grow and snakes mating/twisting around each other. I created a video with spliced editing and then sped up. This was a key spark for the show, and it seemed important for me to recreate this movement in my body in the rehearsal studio. Something in the reaching, the twisting, twining, climbing was incredibly reminiscent of a person struggling to be reborn and find pleasure through pain. It was

important for me in my creation process to investigate these images from nature by putting them into my body through movement.

The central themes in this play are pleasure/pain and birth/death. The character's major growth - or transition - comes from these themes. They move from pain/death to birth/pleasure. This means that at the beginning of the play, more of the writing fits into the death and pain, and as the show progresses, it fits more into birth/pleasure. Taking the playwright's workshop with Carmen Aguirre was helpful in figuring this out. One thing I struggled with is that a lot of my scenes and writing fit into the birth/pleasure themes rather than death/pain. It made me realize that there is not as big a transformation from beginning to end, and therefore I had to make that clearer in my writing.

The masks are also critical to the content of this show. The first mask I decided to use for *Grape Head* was a simple nylon stocking. Bringing life into a stationary object that I had lying around the house brought me joy and sparked the idea for the entire piece. However, I soon convinced myself that the only mask that I wanted in the piece was the nylon stocking and discouraged myself from building others. This changed, and I have since built a second larger mask, and have been playing with additional fabric. The nylon mask has been a large part of the creation process since the beginning. In February 2021 I began to build a second mask which is now integral to the piece. In the beginning of the play the transformation will be happening to Ampelos, and in the end they will choose to become the grape. We will get a snippet of them as the grape at the beginning in the nylon stocking, and at the end we will see them choosing to become the grape and live in the world. At the end of the play they finally answer a call from their mom to come out to her.

Anne Carson has been a massive inspiration for this piece since the beginning. Right as I began working on it, Peter Hinton-Davies suggested that I read her translation of *The Bakkahi*. This was incredibly informative and helped me to understand more about Dionysus. Carson uses poetics to tell a story and make precise observations about the world and mythology; to see things others cannot. Subsequently, by chance, I stumbled upon both of Anne Carson's novels, *Autobiography of Red* and *Red Doc* sitting beside the dumpster outside of my apartment building. It felt like a sign to read them both. It was funny that this happened as people had been telling me over the past year that my writing was reminiscent of Carson – a high compliment. Since then I have also acquired *Eros*. Carson reimagines Greek myth through poetry to place it seamlessly in a contemporary imagined landscape.

I like to watch theatre and films that transport me to weird, wonderful, fantastic worlds that clearly show a parallel to our own experience. Other inspirations which I listed in my artistic challenge are around mask, performance and aesthetic. *No Fac3* (@nofac3.binch) *Studio Ghibli*, fashion for bank robbers (@fashion_for_bank_robbers), *The Wonderheads* (@thewonderheads) and fringe clown Miss Strawberry (handle unknown) are all examples of artists that inspire me. They create worlds and objects that launch their audiences into another world, into a state of wonder.

Two co-creators/collaborators that continue to inspire and push me to further my art practice are long-time friend and artistic collaborator Becca Jean and director Jay Northcott. We have collaborated together on many projects over the last 8 years and they also are mask makers. Jay is the director of *Grape Head*, as they are a collaborator I admire and trust. I also take inspiration from artists such as the Wonder Heads, Katie Green Art, Ronnie Burkett, The

Festival of Object Manipulation, No Fac3 Binch, Fashion for Bank Robbers, Studio Ghibli, Anime and Mind of a Snail.

Conclusion

While working on *Grape Head* I attempted to create a personalized queer dramaturgy that stayed aware and reflective of its queer roots. I had set the intention to use this dramaturgy as a catalyst to shift the inner compulsion/repulsion paradigm that I feel as a queer/trans artist working in interconnected systems of oppression using processes I oppose. Though I created and investigated a new dramaturgy, I set out a vast amount of techniques and tools that I would like to continue investigating.

Repulsion/compulsion runs deep. While working I was constantly fighting this and was at war with myself as I strived to focus on pleasure and wellness. I found that I would default back to working in ways that repulsed me unless I was super vigilant to fight the doubtful voice in my head telling me that what I was doing was not enough. It was helpful to be aware and re-center my intentions to counter this by asking myself adrienne mare brown's question – what is enough? Responding to myself by saying, maybe this is enough. Ultimately this is a practice that I intend to keep working with as I imagine it will take me more time to undo the harm done through institutionalized learning.

Part of the pleasure that I hoped to bring to my team was disturbed by COVID, fear for our wellbeing and being unable to work together in a physical space. Trying to prioritize well-being on a team can be difficult when external circumstances are different for each member and we are unable to be together in space. This is something to account for in the future when hoping to create equitable spaces and flexibility for members. The fact that my sound designer had to step away from the project for personal reasons forced me to take over sound editing. Luckily having

pleasure and care in mind allowed me to be flexible with myself and my deadlines, giving myself more time to work to do the load. I found that this adaptability and flexibility is important not only to give to ourselves but everyone that we work with. Communication is key within a healthy team and I believe that we created that on ours.

The techniques I set out for myself within my queer dramaturgy also helped me to center and come back to my queer roots. Making masks always grounds me and returns me to my body. It allows me to escape the compulsion/repulsion paradigm and work in a way that feels chosen. Through use of mask I was able to focus on working in a healthy way that felt good to me. Mask making also honed me in on the visual composition of my show through costumes. I was able to return to the aesthetic that I had desired for the show. This also came about when I was able to work with Canva to create the accompanying zine in which I embedded my workshop reading. I would love to focus more on specificity with object manipulation when I am eventually able to stage the show and use the full range of props I had hoped would be part of the work.

Fluidity of character, body and movement was the foundation of developing this show. So much of the show was created through body movements, observation of movements in nature and fluidity of character. The fluidity of character allowed me to shift linear sense of self as well as the characters gender. The concept of self (Ampelos'), becoming lover (Ampelos and Dionysus), becoming deity (Dionysus) allowed the characters in the show to flow together.

Performance space was not as useful for me as I thought it would be in shaping *Grape Head* once I knew that I was unable to work in person. However, I do feel that lack of having a physical performance space allowed me to write in a way that moved me away from the limitations of thinking about performing in physical space, which was a sense of freedom.

Working with my own experiences as a queer trans person was a useful technique, however, finding ways to distinguish the character from myself was key in taking care of myself. Merging fact with fiction allowed to create a new world all together. I thought often of Falen Johnson's advice from when I was working with her in summer of 2020 through Gwaandak Theatre, to make significant changes to the character so you can say "we are similar, but ultimately different".

My perspective on what I perceived as non-linearity changed immensely through this process. I think for a long time I was stuck on really striving to not get stuck in a linear narrative way that I wasn't actually able to tell the story in the way it needed to be. I was resisting so hard, that when I let that resistance soften slightly, I was able to use typical narrative tools for plot three/five act structure to help focus the work. I don't think that this sacrificed the integrity of the work, but rather strengthened it. It allowed me to create a world in the play that I was able to slowly strip a part through poetry and breaking down the linear nature of the world.

Working during COVID caused unforeseen difficulties. It required me to continually adapt my plans and ideas, going through about five different executions of the show. This put me in some difficult positions, and required me to learn sound editing in a way I have never done before. I learned that pleasure and distraction are very different for me. COVID made it incredibly difficult to focus on pleasure, and made me move into a painful distraction mode. I would say the major difference is that something pleasurable becomes painful when you move out of the present and into excess.

Overall I think I set out a large amount of techniques that I believe require to continue being used and refined in order to be fully investigated and understood even after this thesis ends. I intend to continue personalizing my queer dramaturgy and decision making processes during art-

making. The journey to creating a fully personalized queer/trans dramaturgy is long and vast because creating dramaturgy is a lengthy pursuit. Though I believe I have set out a strong framework for myself when making queer art, I also feel as though I have only scratched the surface of what queer/trans dramaturgy is and can be. I wish to soak in my own ideas longer, take what I have learned through this process and continue to probe and investigate my creation/development practices in my career.

Appendixes

Link to Zine

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MDnOHZC1SKo77v_ZQM7ZVjVFNF7t3m2pFAt-Ooa5VeY/edit?usp=sharing

Script

Grape Head

By Eish Van Wieren

1. AMPELOS

Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos on the ivy green hills.

Two hes in love.

Two shes in love.

Two theys in love.

Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos and loved them in turn.

No one believed the two fluids were in love.

No one believed the two fluids.

Ampelos was entrusted by Dionysus to pluck the grapes from a vine atop a tall mountain.

Two theys in love, Ampelos went.

Twisting

Twining

Climbing

Upwards

To the top of the mountain, the top of a vine, to pick the fruit for Dionysus.

2. THE BIKING

Ampelos is biking down the street. They have to avoid things such as cars, people, and other things you may encounter on the Toronto streets.

Socially liberal, fiscally conservative.

Ugh.

They see something on the ground. A snake necklace. They stop, pause and get off to pick it up. They look at it in their hands and look around.

Excuse me, is this yours?

Hey, you, is this yours?

Ah well.

Ampelos' looks at it again, pockets the necklace and keep biking.

Biking is the only way to get around Toronto.

It really is a beautiful city.

Toronto.

“Industry, Intelligence, Integrity”

Or it's new slogan “Diversity our strength”

Tkaranto is its real name.

Treaty 13 and The Williams Treaties territory.

The current and traditional territory of the Missaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa and the Wendat People.

Metis region number 8.

Home to the great lakes and the humber river.

When you drive across the Manitoba Ontario border it says “welcome to the GTA”

People in Toronto think that all of Ontario is part of the GTA.

Beat

Biking is the best way to get around Toronto.

Fast.

Exhilarating.

Biking puts you in your body.

A meditative state.

My friend gave me his old bike when I moved here.

They slam on their brakes!

Hey! Watch it.

Beat.

Car doors.
Don't want to hit one of those.
You'll flip over the top,
crack your skull on the concrete,
and get hit by a vehicle.

Beat.

Oh and streetcar tracks.
Watch for streetcar tracks.
Or your tire will get stuck.
You'll flip over the top,
crack your skull on the concrete,
and get hit by a vehicle.

And sometimes the bike lanes end suddenly
So you have to be careful.
Watch for traffic.
Construction.
People who walk or run in the bike lane.
Night time biking,
main streets,
hills,
glass on the road.

But seriously biking in toronto is great.
My friend gave me his bike when I moved here.
You can get everywhere faster,
really explore the city.
It's quicker then the ttc and cheaper then an UBER.

I like to get coffee, pick it up for my friends and see how many I can hold in my hand while I ride.

Hope I don't spill it and scald myself with the burning hot liquid.

Or fall off my bike in the process.

Flip over the top,

crack my skull on the concrete,

and get hit by a vehicle.

A fun challenge.

I've thought of working for Uber Eats.

Or as a courier.

Make some money while enjoying the outdoors.

Biking around Toronto is really fantastic.

Beat. Their phone rings. They look at it and cancel the call.

Socially liberal, fiscally conservative.

Scoff. Beat.

My mom.

She's in Calgary.

Cowtown.

"Come for the mountains, stay for the view"

"be part of the energy™"

Or it's real name is Mohkínstsis

"Where the elbow meets the bow"

Treaty 7 territory.

Metis Region Number 3.

My much less flattering name for Calgary is:

"The glistening bowels of prairies."

Beautiful yet shitty.

When I tell people in Toronto I'm from out west, they say: oh cool, you're from Vancouver.

I say, no, Alberta.

They stare at me as if Alberta is not out west.
And then they say, Oh, well Banff is supposed to be beautiful
And I agree.

Because they're right.
Banff is beautiful.

A white person drives by in a super expensive convertible with a pride sticker next to a pro-police sticker on its bumper.

Ew. Socially liberal fiscally conservatives they're everywhere.

Beat.

They have arrived at the grocery store. They pick up a bag of full of stuff.

3. THE PLUCKING

Ampelos' is at home. They begin taking the items they just returned with out of the bag and setting them up on a table. This includes two bowls and a bag of grapes, which they put in one of the bowls.

They pluck a grape and look at it.

There are things you can't see with your eyes.

Beat. They eat the grape then continue plucking grapes and putting them into a bucket.

Many tiny things.
Many large things.
Many things inside us.
Many things outside us.

Microbes, atoms, dust particles, planets, galaxies, dinosaurs, radio waves, the earth spinning beneath our feet, our organs, jitters, anxiety, hate, love, pain, germs, things behind us, people behind doors, people in their houses, through the computer, into the internet, our blood flowing in our veins, things in process, changing.

Beat.

However, there are exceptions to every rule.

Ampelos' begins plucking the grapes faster and less carefully, pulling off multiples of the vine at a time.

You can see dust particles if there are a lot of piling up on an old abandoned object.

You can see a dinosaur if you examine its dead dinosaur bones.

You can see hate in someone's eyes.

Love too.

If you use tools, like a telescope, you can see other stars a million miles away as they burn out.

Use a microscope and boom! Microbes.

If you film a flower as it dies, you can see it wilt.

Processes can be seen when you watch from beginning to end.

There's always an exception.

Beat. They pause and examine the grapes.

Fermentation is a delicate process.

Sauerkraut

Pickles

Kimchi

Beer

They need time.

Care.

Tending too.

But it's also not that complicated.

Figure out the basics, the rest will take care of itself

And pretty soon you'll have something new.

You won't see it happening, but there will be subtle changes

And one day you'll realize.

That it's ready to be eaten.

Or drank.

Beat.

They pull the snake necklace out of their pocket and look at it and put it on the table.

I've always imagined myself as a creature of the night.
I stay in bed all day and crawl out when the evening arrives.

I want to buy a ball python.
I'm a snake person.
I want to buy a ball python because I'm a snake person and I'm a snake person for three reasons:

One - I am not a dog person
Two - I am not a cat person
and Three - I am definitely one hundred and fifty five percent NOT a hamster person.

So that leaves me as a snake person.

Beat.

I don't want you to think that the only reason I'm a snake person is because there is no other option.

There are many other kinds of person's you can be.
All sorts.
Many choices.
Many options.

You see I like snakes.
I like that they look like they should be slimy but they're not.
I like that they don't have legs.
I like that they can twist their body along the ground.
That they slither.
That when they mate it looks like they're dancing.
That some people are afraid of them.
That they can devour live animals.
That they can be very timid or very ferocious.

That they have personality.

Ampleos disregards any care that remained throwing grapes in the bin, stems and all.

I want to get a python because pythons have holes in their head that look like eyes.

But they're not.

They're pit organs.

Pit organs look like eyes but they're not.

They're not eyes

The nerve cells in the pit organ send a signal through proteins that allow snakes to see their prey in infrared.

Or something like that.

It means they see at night - which I would love to do.

It means they see better without eyes.

In the dark.

The coolest thing about snakes though?

They shed their skin.

They shed their skin all at once.

They slough it off in one go and continue on their way.

When they reach a point where further growth is not possible, they move on.

Let part of them die.

Leave behind the part they don't need anymore.

Still the same creature but somehow different.

Beat.

I think we could learn a thing or two from snakes.

Humans are so slow.

We lose things without even noticing.

We lose our cells without even noticing
and we are in constant mourning for them.

Constant mourning.

Constant loss.

Beat. At this point all of the grapes are in the bin - or almost in the bin.

So I'm going to buy a ball python and when it sloughs off its skin I'll put it on my altar and maybe they'll finally hear me.

Dionysus.

Deity of arriving. Of beginnings

Divinity of Pleasure, Madness, Frenzy.

Goddess of change.

God of partying

Gox of queerness.

Gets a bottle of wine and two goblets.

Dionysus is like a snake.

Shedding their skin, becoming someone new.

Something new.

Constantly taking new shape.

Like water.

Like wine.

Fluid.

Ampelos opens the bottle of wine and pours two glasses. One for them, and one for dionysus. They put it down by the snake necklace and cheers the air.

Dionysos, we see you in shadows.

your presence is a heady wine, with even a sip

we are drunk upon you, and our faith is affirmed.

We get lost, we wander, we are found.

They drink.

4. THE TWISTING

Ampelos begins twisting around on the ground. They move on the floor as they start to metamorphosize into a grape from the head up. It is bright purple, and then not. It is painful.

Audio:

The evolution of a climbing habit has been implicated as a key innovation associated with the evolutionary success and diversification of a number of plants. It has evolved independently in several plant families, using many different climbing methods, such as:

Twining stems

Thorns or other hooked structures

Clinging roots

Tendrils

5. DIONYSUS

The connecting audio begins to play.

Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos on the ivy green hills.

Two hes in love.

Two shes in love.

Two theys in love.

Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos and loved them in turn.

Ampelos gathered and gathered, plucked and plucked, grape after grape.

Twisting

Twining

Climbing

Upwards

For Dionysus.

Their love Dionysus.

No one believed the two fluids were in love.

No one believed the two fluids.

Higher and higher Ampelos climbed to show their love to the great Dionysus.

Higher and higher Ampelos climbed to the top of the vine at the top of the mountain.

Higher and higher Ampelos climbed until they could climb no more, for there was no more to climb, and so they found themselves falling.

Two shes in love,

Two hes in,

Two theys in love.

No one believed the two fluids were in love.

No one believed the two fluids.

6. THE SENSITIVE

Ampelos is tired and a bit confused. They have symptoms of a hangover. Pounding headache. Stomach aches. They reel in pain and pour themselves another glass of wine.

I'm a little sensitive.

Like, I've been told I'm a little sensitive.

All my life.

"Don't be so sensitive"

"Your too sensitive"

Sensitive.

Sensitive.

Sensitive.

I thought of getting it as a tattoo across the back of both my arms.

Half on one side, half on the other.

sensi tive

Maybe that would make me -

What's the opposite of sensitive?

Insensitive?

Make me more insensitive.

Get a tattoo of sensitive to make me more insensitive.

Ha.

That's ironic isn't it.

Sensitive tattoo to make you more insensitive.

I wonder if that's what they want?

The people who say you're too sensitive?

For you to become insensitive.

Seems absurd for a bunch of people to want to create a bunch of insensitive people.

There's already enough insensitive pricks in the world.

Walking around, not feeling anything.

Checks phone again.

In nature if you're sensitive, you're more tuned in.

To your senses.

Sharp vision.

Awareness of subtle vibrations.

Acute hearing.

Heightened in some areas,
less so in others.

Snakes can't hear very well, but they see in infrared.

Slugs can't hear either but they can track the odor of food using their tentacles and the wind.

Why?

Because they're fucking sensitive.

Imagine what we could accomplish if we tuned in.

Allowed ourselves to feel.

Really feel.

Really really feel.

To our fucking core.

Open up.

Be sensitive .

To other people.

Those around us.

We'd make some noise, some, change.

7. THE INSENSITIVE

Checks their phone again. Sighs and throws it behind them.

She was supposed to call.

5 days ago.

Well not call.

Text.

I've been waiting for him to text me.

I mean visit.

For 5 days.

I think they think I'm too sensitive.

Which I am.

Sensitive.

But not 'too'

Not 'too' sensitive.

Maybe not even sensitive enough.

Beat.

She might just be busy.
He's probably just busy.
I mean, they are ethereal after all.

Beat

But still, they said they'd appear to me 5 days ago and didn't.
So I'm trying to let it go.
Let him go.
I'll probably never talk to them again,
On the account of me being too sensitive.

So I'm trying to prepare myself,
for you know, her not to materialize.

Like doomsday prep and shit.

I'm used to people not calling.

It's fine.
If they don't reach out it's fine.
He doesn't owe me anything.
We don't owe each other anything.
So it's fine.
Not hanging out is fine.
I'm fine.
I'm fine if we don't hangout.

Beat.

Oh gox!

Beat.

I think I'm uhauling.
They probably think I'm uhauling.

I mean if they ever tried to read my mind they definitely wouldn't show up because they'd definitely think I'm uhauling.

Which possibly I am.

But, like, she could reach out to tell me she doesn't want to see me, right?
That would be nice wouldn't it?
He doesn't have to obviously.
They can do whatever she wants but it sure would be nice.

I've been trying to reach them for days now,
And nothing.
If they don't want me to try to contact them then they could tell me and I'd stop.

Gox.
It's just I have a few things to tell her.
Questions I never got to ask them.
Things I never got to say.

Like,

Do you think I'll still love you when I learn your body inside and out?

When I've catalogued your mind, your thoughts, your wants, your desires?

When I've embroidered the map of your form into my brain, caressed all your ins, your outs, chest, thighs, limbs, kissed every inch of your skin, asked you every question on the tip of my tongue, had all your innards pushed through my esophagus while fighting to speak, to breathe.

Will I still love you?

I know, it's only been one night and yet somehow it feels like centuries.
Divine centuries of loving, laughing, kicking, screaming.

When I am with you, you are all I see.
You are all there is.

I forget my emptiness.
I forget my fullness.
I transcend my body.
There is a merging.
There is a swallowing.

Beat.

I'd get your name -
Dionysus -
tattooed across my chest in a basement
only to cross it out a week later with ink.

Beat.

Everything dwindles to mutual affection.
A steady handshake,
a brisk hug,
a smile,
a congratulations sent through direct message.

I don't want it to be that way with you.

Beat. Snapping out of the intensity.

Sorry is this too much?
I just realized this might be too much.
I am a gemini cancer cusp and I've been told I can be a little...much.

Beat.

I met her at a wine bar, last week,
well on tinder, and then at the bar.
She said he liked my hair.
They said they thought I was funny.

Beat.

They leap for their phone, check it, sigh, end the call and throw it away again.

Uh,
It's not them.
It's cowtown.
Mom.
She won't stop messaging me.
Calling me.
It's annoying.

Beat. Gasp. A realization. They stand up.

Oh my God.

Beat as it hits them.

I'm insensitive...
I'm insensitive?
Holy fucking fuckity fuck
I'm being insensitive.
I'm being fucking insensitive.

Moans annoyingly.

Oh goodddd i'm being insensitive.

Like, I love my mom.
She's the best.
She breeds dogs.
She welds.
She's originally from Toronto.
She's fucking cool.
We're pretty close!
It's just, ughhhhhhhh

Moans annoyingly again.

I know how this sounds.
Like, poor me.
An otherworldly theybie won't get back to me.
I'm white and privileged and a fricken adult.

I have a family who would probably accept me, but I'm ignoring them.
I just need to tell my mom I'm turning into a grape.

Beat.

I know it's not a big deal.
But I can't.
For some reason I can't.

Beat

What kind of bullshit world have we created where people even need to come out as a grape in the first place?

Ugh.

Beat.

I need a drink.

They open their bottle of wine and pour two glasses. They cheers the air.

Dionysos, we see you in shadows.
your presence is a heady wine, with even a sip
we are drunk upon you, and our faith is affirmed.
We get lost, we wander, we are found.

They drink.

8. THE TWINING

The glass drops.

Ampelos falls to the ground and begins moving. Their body twines in different ways at all their joints. This is both painful and pleasurable. Their body is bright neon green and their head is bright purple has lost all characteristics. They are a grape with a stem. When this ends they stay green. They are becoming more grape.

9. THE CRUSHING

Ampelos takes the grapes they plucked earlier and transfers them into a bucket. They begin crushing them with their hands and stomping on them with their feet.

Wine is beautiful.

Even though, at surface, you think there are only two kinds: red and white,

There is so much more specificity and diversity within each category.

Within the whites you can have different types:

Sauv Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Grigio.

Reds

Cab Sauv, Merlot, Zinfandel, Syrah/Shiraz, Malbec, Pinot Noir.

And then you have blends, champagnes, mulled wines, ice wines or rose's that don't fit into either category.

They are a bit of both, something entirely different.

Each wine is made totally differently with totally different processes.

One slight change to the grape or the ingredients changes the whole vat.

It depends where in the world the grapes are from,

when they are picked,

how they are processed.

Wine can be expensive, bougie.

It can be for the proletariat and cheap.

Beat.

I met her at a wine bar, last week.
We met at a pub two nights before,
and then we again, for a real date at the wine bar.
I think I maybe came on a bit strong.

Beat.

Dionysus is an old Gox.
They turned their dead lovers into grape vines,
and made something out of them.

Beat.

Perhaps we all are...
part of Dionysus.
The things we love.
Care for.
Tend to.
Entwine in.

You are what you eat.
What you pay attention to grows.

10. THE BITS

Ampelos bikes down the street. They have to avoid things that you might find on the Toronto streets. They are a grape out in the world.

There were bits of,
chunks of,
parts of,
Me.
That only they could drink
inside of the outside,
outside of the inside.

We met at a club on the danforth on the wellesley on the queen.
It doesn't matter where we met.
Or if it was a club,
or a park,
or whether they had a name or a body for that matter.
But there were chunks of,
parts of
bits of
flesh.

That went on my flesh.
Liquid flesh inside my stomach then up through my eyes.

Beat.

To be honest they were more of a thing of the sky.
Came down on vines,
their face was no face,
wielding a thyrsus,
a wand,
a staff,
a part of themselves attached to the top.

Beat.

We met at a bar on college street down by the water in front of high park.
A pond met a lake met a hotdog stand.
When they asked me to come home with them they took me to my home instead and said they
were always there, then disappeared to a place inside my stomach.

Little itty purples.
Itty bitty reds.
Greens.
Inside of my bathroom.
Inside of my head.

Beat.

Dionysus was the most popular kid in their class;

however not really because they liked to get into trouble.
Liked to arrive late.

I liked to arrive late, so when I met them on the danforth, outside of the ttc, outside of time,
both of us blew smoke through mouths;
through each other's mouths,
and into the pits of our stomachs.

A couple of lesbian gay bisexual theybies out on the street,
inside of the moonlight;
always outside until inside.
Bits and parts.
Inside, outside.
Outside, inside.
Fleshy bits.
Gushy bits.
Softy bits.
Chunky bits.
Of skin, of amethyst, of blood, of violets, of bones, of forests.

Beat.

So they took me home, but it was my home, so really I took them home,
and we lost track of which one of us was which.
Both of us losing ourselves: but them never having a self in the first place.

Earlier that night I bought them a cocktail from a fancy cocktail bar,
but they poured it out and climbed behind the bar to grab a bottle of red,
from some region in spain, some region in the east of spain,
that they had ordered once, that they had made once,
that someone had poured for them once.

From flesh.
My flesh.
Poured the wine from spain out of my flesh and into their glass.
Then we were out on the danforth, out in the cold,
a night ride on a street car going south and then west on queen.

Beat.

Sometimes they say the wrong thing to me and it makes me laugh.
Sometimes they say the wrong thing to me and it makes me cry.
But we always arrive at the same place: the middle of nowhere.
Licking each other's ins, licking each other's outs,
and whispering melodic sighs by each other's ears.

They are me until they're not.
I am them until I'm not.

Beat.

As a teen, Dionysus had a hand carved thyrsus that they used to smash mail boxes.
Hated the anticipation of waiting for mail to arrive.
"It will come when it comes and leave when it leaves.
I don't want to think about it till it's there"

Beat.

We met at strip club at lansdowne and bloor, a block east of lansdowne and bloor,
there were beautiful dancers performing years of hard work.
Masters of their craft.
One dancer worth a thousand business suits on bay street.

A box of wine, 3 muff dives and a melodic sigh later,
we're out the door and on the way to my house.
Only I was alone with them inside my belly: a drink inside my belly.

They come from the sky, stitched inside of lightning.
Or that's what they told me
Really they're from Alberta too.
East west in Calgary on crowchild trail,
just a block or two from 17th ave,
on the alley parallel to center street.

Beat.

Before I knew them, I knew them.
Inside. Outside.
Outside. Inside.

People can get over anything.
Anything can get over people.
However they are not people and I am not anything.
Just fluid.
Fluids.
Two fluids.
Fluidy.
Anything but over and over but anything.

They stop biking and find themselves at a grocery store. They enter.

11. THE GROCERY STORE

Ampelos wanders the aisles of the grocery store.

There are times to go to the grocery store and there are times to order in.
Timing is everything.

Beat.

The meat section makes me horny.
Chunks of flesh.
Flesh in flesh.
Flesh on flesh.
Tied up with rope.
Bound in plastic.

I feel like a dominatrix.
Slapping bound up flesh as I walk by.

Fleshy bits.
Gushy bits.
Tender bits.
Softy bits.
Slapped, cut, bitten into.

Sounds like a solid Saturday afternoon.

Beat.

Prosciutto and salami are the trendiest kids at the party.
Salty bitches whisper secrets back and forth.
“You can age as long as you want, we’ll always be better.”
Contested by the other cured meats and cheeses sitting next to them and
the wines across the aisle,
All of whom have been ripening for the same amount of time or longer.

Some people say blue cheese is too strong, too pungent.
But the longer it sits out the better it tastes.
The moldier it gets and the more delicious it becomes.
The art of cheese is in the waiting.
The art of fermentation is in the sitting.
The time that passes once the ingredients are added.
Sitting, waiting. Sitting, waiting.
In wrappers, plastic, wooden containers, glass bottles, jars, barrels.

After the waiting,
there is the becoming.
Reaching outwards to grow into the thing they were always meant to be.
The shedding of skin to become something new.
Someone new.
Constantly.

By the time food has arrived at the grocery store, it’s already ready.
We’ve missed the transformation.
We think what we’re getting is instantaneous.

Beats

How many foods in the grocery store do you think are dead lovers of goxes?
Transformed by Dionysus and then consumed.
The gouda,
the pepperoni,
the kimchi,
the pickles.
Once people who worshipped Dionysus, loved them, entwined in them.

Self becomes lover becomes deity.
Deity becomes lover becomes self.

But they have always lived in me.
They give a bit of themselves to the things that they make,
By becoming entwined with their dead lovers in the grocery store.
Taking new shape.
Inside, outside.
Outside, inside.
Like water.
Like wine.
Fluid.

They leave the grocery store taking with them a packet of yeast and a bottle of wine. They turn around and they are home.

12. The Bathroom

Ampelos picks up the snake necklace and wraps it around the bottle of wine. They play with the snake, speaking to it as if Dionysus.

There are vines in the bathroom.
Their bathroom.
My bathroom.
We keep a sort of company - them scrambling up the walls, me along the floor.
When I go to bed I kiss them goodnight from across the room.
At work I order wine and send it to their door.

There is a kind of understanding, a forgiveness.
When I forget to leave the tap on,
When they forget to wish me a happy birthday.
They are vines after all.

Where they go and what they do when I am not around is not my business.
I do not ask and they do not tell.

When I close my eyes vines are all I see.

They are all there is.
Tendrils spinning.
Tendrils swimming.
They are my divine intervention.
There are parts of myself that only vines can see with eyes closed under blankets.
If I could stitch vines inside my DNA then perhaps I would feel whole.

Green blood.
Purple eyes.
Forest organs.
Lavender tongues.
Mossy heart.
Violet limbs.
Fuzzy bones.
Amethyst skin.

13. THE CLIMBING

Ampelos falls to the ground. They begin a climbing movement initiated first in their legs, moving towards their wrists and arms. Eventually they are standing and reaching upwards all parts of their body moving at various times their joints rotating. Their body is neon green, their face a large bulbous grape. This moment is pleasurable and joyful.

Audio:

The evolution of a climbing habit has been implicated as a key innovation associated with the evolutionary success and diversification of a number of plants. It has evolved independently in several plant families, using many different climbing methods, such as:

Twining stems

Thorns or other hooked structures

Clinging roots

Tendrils

14. FLUIDS

Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos on the ivy green hills.
Two hes in love.

Two shes in love.
Two theys in love.
Beardless Ampelos, they say, was loved by Dionysos and loved them in turn.

Dionysus searched for Ampelos at the top of the mountain,
Instead finding them at the bottom, impaled on a branch, far beneath the vine.

Dionysus wept over Ampelos.
Dionysus wept over their love.
Dionysus wept, until their tears changed Ampleos into the vine they died climbing, full of the lush grapes they died to pick.

Ampelos, transformed, offered themselves, yet again, to be fermented into wine.

Two fluids in love.
Two fluids.

15. The Pouring

Ampelos is transferring the grapes they crushed into a new container by pouring them into a new wooden container where it will ferment. When the grapes are poured into the new barrel they open a little packet of yeast and pour it in and stir. Then they stare at it for quite some time, pick up the bottle of wine with the snake necklace wrapped around it and finally look up.

I'm going to be honest,
This is my first time making wine.
I'm not totally sure what happens next,
But I think it's gonna be good.

They laugh.

I guess we wait.
Let this liquid sit in its flesh sack -
I mean wooden barrel -
and ferment.
Until it transforms into something new.
Until it's ready to be drunk.

Beat.

Dionysos, we see you in shadows.

your presence is a heady wine, with even a sip

we are drunk upon you, and our faith is affirmed.

We get lost, we wander, we are found.

They are completely a grape on a vine. They love it.

Their phone rings. It is their mom. They answer.

Hello.

As Ampelos talks on the phone, they move - twisting twining climbing motions on the ground and standing. It is pleasurable. Enjoyable. They are becoming. They have already become.

Grape Head Images

The following images are images that will appear in the zine. They are illustrative of the aesthetic, costumes, masks and process of the piece as well as some inspiration referenced earlier in the paper.



Figure 1 Zine Image



Figure 2 Zine Image



Figure 3 Zine Image

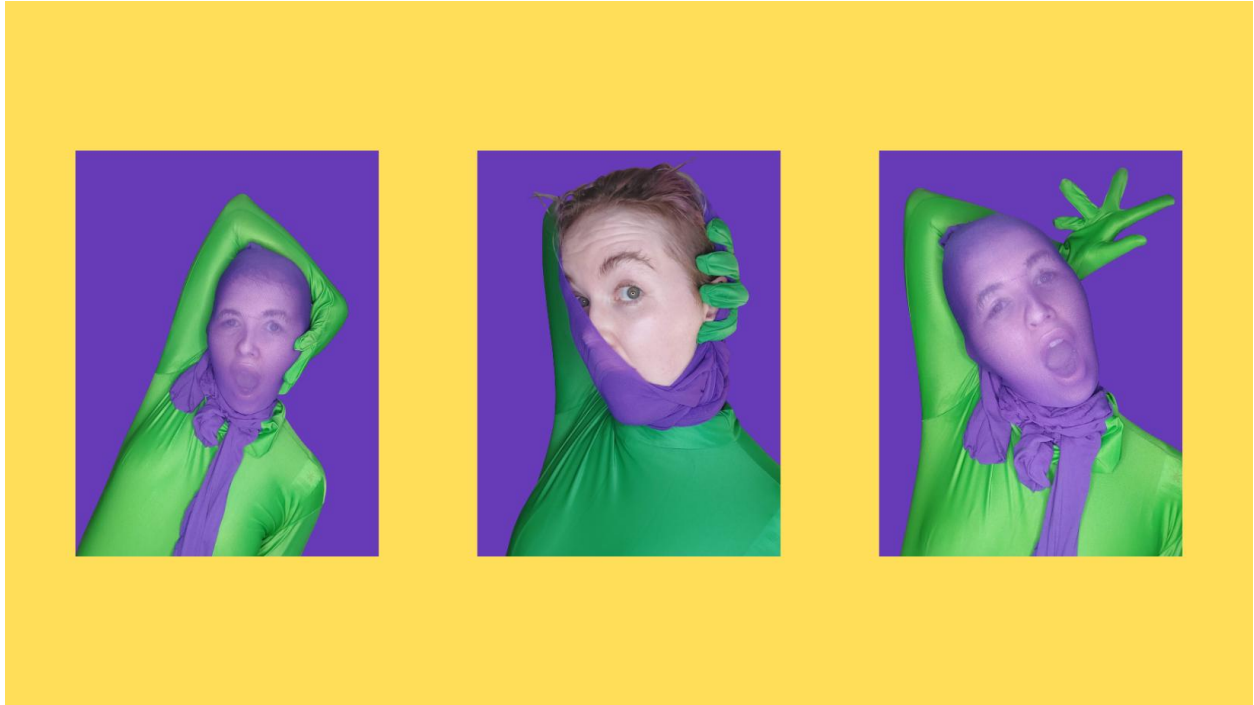


Figure 4 Zine Image



Figure 5 Rehearsal Image



Figure 7 Mask Exploration Photo



Figure 6 Mask Exploration Photo



Figure 8 In Progress Mask Building



Figure 9 Zine Images and Mask Exploration



Figure 10 Zine Image and Mask Exploration



Figure 11 Show Inspiration Vines Twining



Figure 12 Show Inspiration Snakes Twisting

Production Elements

Due to the pandemic, my original plan for my thesis changed multiple times since its original conception. My original idea was to stage the play for an audience at the small York studio that was offered to me pre-pandemic in the Center for Theatre and Film. Then, after considering doing an online version for some time, I decided to focus on using the JGG black box theatre at York and having a small team in to workshop the play. I found a videographer who was excited about creating an art film version to share to an audience at a later date. The week I started my three-week workshop period however, I was brought to a halt when I was exposed to COVID-19 on the subway on my way to the university, which I was informed of through the Canadian Government's COVID-19 tracker app. Fortunately my tests all came back negative, but I was forced to quarantine for two weeks alone in my basement suite. My team and I decided that we would use the time we had planned in person as a transition into doing a

dramaturgical workshop online. In some ways it ended up being a blessing for further script development. In other ways it was very sad that we couldn't stage it or use the theatre and resources at York. The recorded reading from the workshop is being edited by myself and my sound designer.

Team and Artist Bios

Eish Van Wieren (Performer/Writer/Creator): is a queer genderfluid-trans-nonbinary transdisciplinary artist from Mohkinstis/Calgary who divides their time with Tkaranto/Toronto. They are a theatre practitioner, visual artist, playwright, mask maker, performer, musician, designer and educator who also works in film and TV.

Fundamentally, their practice takes inspiration from, and is in conversation with, nature as a generative space of possibility. This continuously inspires them to give life to drawings, paintings, stories and original masks of human-like monsters; bodies that stretch, grow, and oscillate wildly. These creations attempt to capture and confront their own body dysmorphia and transform it into euphoric, wondrous, haunting beings/stories that are animated by joyousness, vibrancy and physical performance.

Eish attempts to create work that “splats” onto the stage, page, or screen and strives to situate their work in a queer and anti-oppressive framework to unsettle their practice as a settler.

You can find them on instagram [@splatbonfitz_productions](https://www.instagram.com/splatbonfitz_productions) or at

www.splatbonfitz.wordpress.com

Select credits include: Grape Head (SplatBonFitz Productions), The Void (Buddies in Bad Times), The Tape (AkwardSpace Film Productions), Apartment Show Online (Thumbs Up Good

Work), The Parasite (Buddies in Bad Times), Disparate Worlds (SplatBonFitz Productions), ToastHer (Femme Wave/Sage Theatre).

Jay Northcott (director): Jay is a multidisciplinary artist; director, playwright, burlesque dancer, and producer. Jay works to decolonize their art and practice with storytelling, movement, and gesture to create a foundation for their work. They continue to grow and make it their mission to continue to unlift projects that put BIPOC Queer artists in the spotlight.

Credits include: Cottagers and Indians (Watemark Theatre, PEI), White Muscle Daddy (Pencil Kit Production), Blacktop Sky (Obsidian Theatre), Passover (Obsidian Theatre, AD) Sweat (Arts Club & Citadel Theatre, AD), Scarlet Letter (Theatre Calgary, AD), Iphigenia and the Furies (Saga Collectif, AD), Cows (Theatre Junction).

Sam Page (sound designer): Having recently graduated with honours from the Theatre Production program @YorkU, with a focus on sound design, Sam Page is grateful to have had a part in the development of Grapehead as a Sound Designer. Sam attributes their time with the core team as a wonderful enriching experience. Some of Sam’s past works include set design for The Trying Times of Sister Bunny featured in the Toronto Fringe Festival 2021, and sound design for Mortified with Theatre@York 2021. Their newest endeavour is sound design for Descent; a choose your own adventure show featured in the 5290 Festival hosted by Past Lives Production Company. Best wishes and stay safe folks!

Budget

Expenses	Revenue	In Kind
Director Fee \$600	Theatre@York \$1000	Donations \$550

Sound Designer/Editor \$750		Microphone \$200
Props/Costumes \$200		Rehearsal Space \$1000

Rough Timeline	
Nov 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin meeting with director Jay Northcott and videographer - Begin search for design team
Dec 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OAC Recommender grant deadlines - Playwrights Workshop Montreal workshop with Carmen Aguirre - Writing continues and rewrites
Jan 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure sound designer Sam Page, meet with them and director
Feb 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued development of play
March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure and get approved for JGG space - Meetings with Theatre @ York Faculty Production Coordinator Christina to figure out tech schedule and rehearsal space - Find new videographer as other one fell through
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solo rehearsals and staging at York April 17 – May 1 - **Exposed to COVID-19 on subway to York and forced to isolate for 2 weeks - ** Third wave worse in Ontario and new measures introduced
May 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May 2 – May 8 staged workshop with director, sound designer - Film May 8 - **Altered timeline to work online – workshop to start May 4th

	- **Recording of reading to happen May 18th
June 2021	- Tracks to be edited by June 5 - **Sound designer had to step back – Eish taking over editing
July 2021	- July 14 tracks to be edited - July 16 images and rough digital pdf complete for committee
** = alterations due to unforeseen circumstances	

Post York

I intend to apply for a Canada Council grant in October so I can do another workshop to stage the play since this unfortunately was not able to happen in the way I had envisioned it this year. I would use the funding to also build more masks and enhance the costumes and.

Once the play has been staged (which I will get a good video of for promotional purposes) I will submit it to festivals and attempt to tour the production in Canada or internationally in Europe at fringe festivals or other festivals, such as *Manipulate* – an international object manipulation theatre festival.

Selected Journals

Sound editing

i.

I listened to all of the tracks today and I am so frustrated because the levels are all screwed up. I feel compelled to re-record the entire play but I do not have the time or the capacity to do it myself. Therefore I am going to have to figure out how to edit it to make it sound better. This feels really frustrating to me but what can you do.

ii.

Re-editing audio tracks today because the last time I once again I tried to listen to them all in order I cringed so hard I had to stop it. The quality of the audio is awful – likely because I recorded it alone on a microphone in my basement when I wasn't allowed to leave my house because of COVID quarantine. The sound designer did a good job on their tracks but they are slightly different levels when listening through. Next time I will ensure that I have a separate designer and an editor on board.

Though In the past have spliced audio together or made music tracks, when editing audio I feel like I have no idea what I am doing. My friend the other day told me about compression so I have been watching youtube videos on equalizing, limiting and compressing in audacity. I have access to ableton through my friends account but it is too complicated to use if you are not directly recording into it (or too complicated for me to use) even though the tools are likely better then audacity which is a freeware program.

Right now I am frustrated that I am essentially starting from scratch, trying to get the tracks to be a similar tone and volume. I feel that no matter how much time I put into it, I won't be able to get it to sound how I like. I suppose this could be a freeing idea but it's more of a bummer as this is why I hired someone on in the first place, to avoid being in this situation.

Oh well. I am learning a lot in this process.

iii.

After editing all of the tracks I realized that I made them too quiet when I compressed them so I had to go back through. I also added a limiter on them and turned up the bass. They still are not the quality that I would like but they sound better now.

I asked my mom to listen to the play and she told me it was all too quiet for her to hear at full volume. This was helpful because she has a hard time hearing sometimes so it is a good indication that others may have the same problem. I then had to go back through each scene and make adjustments. It is better now but not perfect. It will have to be what it is. It is not perfect but I am happier with it.

In Person Rehearsals and COVID Disruption

April 15th 2021

Today I did a quick script reading which recorded. I keep reading about how Ontario's lockdown might get worse. I am worried they will shut us down and I won't be able to my thesis as planned and approved for COVID-19 guide lines. It's difficult to work as I wish to with this in mind and it has continually clouded my mind. I suppose I just have to keep working as if we can do it in person and take the punches as they come.

Doing a reading was nice. It made me see the script with fresh eyes. There is a lot I want to shift in the script before my rehearsal start or within my rehearsals while working it will be interesting to do the workshop without my designer present but i guess that's better than not having anyone present.

Compulsion/repulsion has got me feeling a way. I am constantly at war with myself as I try to work on edits of the script.

What is enough? What would be enough for this script and this version of the show?

April 16th 2021

Reread and worked on the script today. Created an updated props/costumes list.

Stressed out about the new restrictions and how it will affect the project. Worried they will cancel us in a week. It makes it challenging to focus and get stuff done. I'm excited to get in the studio monday though.

April 17th 2021 morning

So today I decided that I'm going to stay home to work to change the covid guidelines I'm a little bit anxious about that I think it'll still be fine to go to York approval you know what I need to do today I can do from home so I think there's going to be like a lot of that reflection but starting next week I'll definitely need to be up there all the time today I plan is to like work on the script and go through all of them movement videos that I have as well as to start actioning like being my actors were on the that I have even though I'm going to keep working on it so I can do all of that from home and I'll do that tomorrow to and then Monday I'll go up to York and I'll start blocking everything and put it on its feet a lot scary it's so weird covid like cuz normally I would have been up at the University living there looks like had access to the studio like any

time that I needed it and it's very hard and having to like adjust on the fly like working who can Monday I'll be up there

April 17 Afternoon

This weekend my goals are to

1. Re-watch all of my movement and mask videos to help block the movement sequences in the show
2. Rewrite a few sections of script
3. Actors work (actioning and tactics)
4. Gather all supplies for Monday
5. Plan three days of rehearsals/ studio time

Having a hard time bringing all the narrative threads of the show together/figuring out how it will end. I know that is what the workshop is for but I definitely feel compelled to have a product ready - "a final script" by the 24th. I want to fight this feeling!!

April 19th 2021 Studio Day One

What a day. What a time.

Honestly this morning I was very stressed about taking transit to York and feeling guilty for working on this during a lockdown. I made it York however and on the subway with my anxiety on high, on the verge of tears with a panic attack insight I said "fuck you" in my head to everything and everyone stressing me out (the government namely) and said to myself "you can stop this if you have to / need to, it's your thesis. You could run away home right now".

Somehow that made my anxiety woosh up and out of me.

Suffice to say, I didn't run away and I made it to the studio. I had a lot of resistance when I got in but once I started working it was SO MUCH FUN! My morph suit makes my costume look amazing and I figured out set. I was dancing and laughing my ass off. It was great to have room and be working on my feet.

JOY!

So, IDGAF anymore/ In the best of ways. Whatever I end up with is fine with me. Fuck it. Even if the whole thing changes to a 15 minute silent piece IDGAF anymore. Obviously I'm going to do my best but what I have is awesome and even as an image or a series of images it could work.

So if we get cancelled I'll make my performance a book/script reminiscent of rhubarb and do a reading.

It's funny, you can tell yourself you are going to work one way and then it is fucking impossible to kill your that voice in your head telling you you're doing it wrong. It comes and goes in waves. It is a practice.

Every time i am granted studio access I get way more done in way less time. Wow. COVID has made working so hard.

I think I figured out some of the weirdness with the script. I think I just want it to be that Ampelos is avoiding their mom because they haven't come out yet.

It will end with them as a full grape having a phone call with mom as recorded audio telling her their name, pronouns etc. It will be a real recorded conversation with my mom based on our actual conversations this year. It'll be cute, truer to the show and more real. Then I can get rid of the weird oil thread. IDK if it should be me or the character name I ask her to call me.

Anyways now I just need to get my ass to Michaels. It's super hard to make stuff with the dollar store not letting you buy most stuff right now because of the lockdown. The Michaels is far from my house and I don't have a car here.

Tomorrow I will run what I blocked today and the first movement part.

I feel like I am moving through blocking the show very slowly. I am 10 pages in out of 30 which I guess is not too bad. My focus in the studio was disastrous today. I spend most of my time on the enby/trans reddit forums and writing a post. IT IS FUCKING HARD TO WORK ALONE DURING A PANDEMIC.

That being said I ran the first ten pages of blocking and did a n improv of the twisting acne. I still need to do some rewrites which I am about to work on now. First I will watch what I blocked and take some notes.

April 20th 2021 Studio Day Two

So this morning I woke up at 4am to a notification from the Government of Canada on the COVID notification app telling me that I had been exposed to COVID-19 in the last 50 hours (The COVID-19 app lets you know when someone around you that you have sat next to for 15 minutes or more has tested positive for COVID). I am assuming it was on the train up to York.

Didn't sleep well and texted Jamie at six to tell him and set up a meeting. When you get a notification like this it means you have to isolate, which means that I cannot go up to York until I get my COVID test back which I have booked for tomorrow. Obviously rehearsals have come to a halt.

Half of my stuff is up at York in ACE room 207. I'm tired. I thought I could do this but it feels impossible. We also got an email yesterday telling us that York researchers may be cancelled. I'm not sure I want to go up there even if it's not.

April 21st 2021

They told me even if I'm negative I have to quarantine for 2 weeks I'm so tired I can't even.

April 23rd 2021

Met with Jay and we talked about the possibility of extending or postponing a month to do the show in person. I honestly don't think things will be better anytime soon nor will my team be available and I cannot just wait around. We discussed the idea of doing it during the same week and doing a dramaturgical sound workshop/reading and an accompanying digital book of images. I think that is the new plan because I don't trust that I'll be able to do it up there.

Bummed but also excited because I think I'll learn a lot from doing that still want to focus on pleasure and process since things are so hard right now. I'm finding it near impossible to work because of everything that has gone down. I keep being told by others that this is a reasonable way to feel. I hope that all of this prayer work I've done will help pay off

April 26th 2021

Had a meeting with GPD Paul and my supervisor Jamie today told them my plan and they were supportive. Now I need to create my new timeline and deadlines and as I said in a previous entry even though I want to do my workshop next week I feel ill prepared. I am also really sad about this situation because I had such a solid plan and was working hard to make it work. Talking with Mandy later today to get her advice on recording and audio drama because I don't have any experience with sound recording. Looking forward to talking to her. This has been such a shit situation but I'm trying to keep feeling hopeful and excited.

April 26th 2021 Afternoon

My meeting with Mandy was really helpful I have a big list of tips that she gave me on recording sound. I'm quite nervous about doing it on my own and the quality not being good enough but hopefully that will be OK.

- 1) Don't place a window or a Waller big open space with nothing
- 2) Get a pop shield and a good mic - you can build a pop shield with a pantry if you don't with a pantyhose
- 3) Put a blanket on the desk
- 4) Before you record leave about 5 to 10 seconds of open space you can remove it in noise reduction then you can take it out of the rest of the recording
- 5) Record standing or at the edge of the chair
- 6) Breath is nice and acting with voice acting helps to emote do it's just a moment to do what you do in theater just turn tune it down
- 7) Think about room tone
- 8) Leave your set up for the whole times of the sound is similar for consistency
- 9) Try playing with closeness and far away with your voice

Online Workshop Journals

May 3rd 2021

So today we had our first rehearsal first day of the online workshop and it was really lovely. I'm really excited about my team and that we decided to change the timeline a little bit to be more wquitable and meet the work where it's at. We're going to move the recording date to the

19th of May which is great. A big focus on this workshop will be continued dramaturgy and development which is excellent because we don't have to focus on staging or blocking.

It's really awesome to be working with Jay and to have other people in the room. I was very tired of working alone. It's also awesome to be working with Sam. They are both awesome artists and I feel really lucky.

It's fun to be focusing on the play. I feel like because of everything that's happened with COVID I'm behind where I would like to be, but it's good that we're able to adjust. This makes me think of how I compulsion/repulsion and wanting to work in a different way than I am because it doesn't feel good enough.

Meeting the work where it's at is great because of that like the script is not as far along as I wanted it to be because I haven't really been able to work on it effectively. I thought I was doing something completely different until recently so that's hard. I can't help but feel like I haven't done enough work even though I know that it's literally not true. I know it is in a good place and that this was the whole point of this workshop anyway so I'm kind of happy that we're not in the studio because blocking and workshoping the script would have been too much and I think it would have just been so messy because it would have been so rushed in those two weeks.

I'm thinking a lot about product versus process. I feel like I'm really focused on the process and having something that I can share with people. I also know that I need something of a good enough quality so that I can get funding to mount the show in the future. Product vs process is sort of making me confront my conflicting feelings.

I think it was a great day. I learned a lot and have lots of great notes. I'm going to be writing the next couple days until Saturday when we're going to do another read-through. Then I'll do some more rewrites because I'm just not as far along in script as I would like to be .

May 4th 2021

So today I had a writing and development session. it was super productive. I feel like being around other people and being asked questions about my work is exactly what I needed. I still have feelings that I'm not working hard enough even though I know I am There's a voice inside me that's telling me that it's not enough to fit in the university or arts system and I am annoyed by it because we are in a global pandemic. I'm sad that we that we were unable to stage it live or video it, but to be quite frank I feel like the play wouldn't have been where I wanted it to be for its first draft. Ultimately I think this turn of events has been good for the play. It's forcing me to really focus on development and dramaturgy without thinking about how to stage yet. So everything is slower because of the world and I think it's better for the team to work.

May 8th 2021

Did new script edits and reading/dramaturgical work with Jay. They asked me some really great questions about the script which is pushing me to go deeper and finish my edits.

May 18th 2021

Okay so yesterday we had a reading to work through the scenes and Jay gave me feedback for my performance and writing which was super useful. We talked about stage directions and how stage directions will manifest in the audio version. We are asking what is the most important and what is not. The new edits are great I think – I think they really add to the story. We read through each scene a couple times and Jay gave direction which was really great really helpful for me as a performer. Sam was also there adding sounds in when able and sort of

talking through what they envisioned the audio which was really exciting to hear. I can't wait to see how it all comes together.

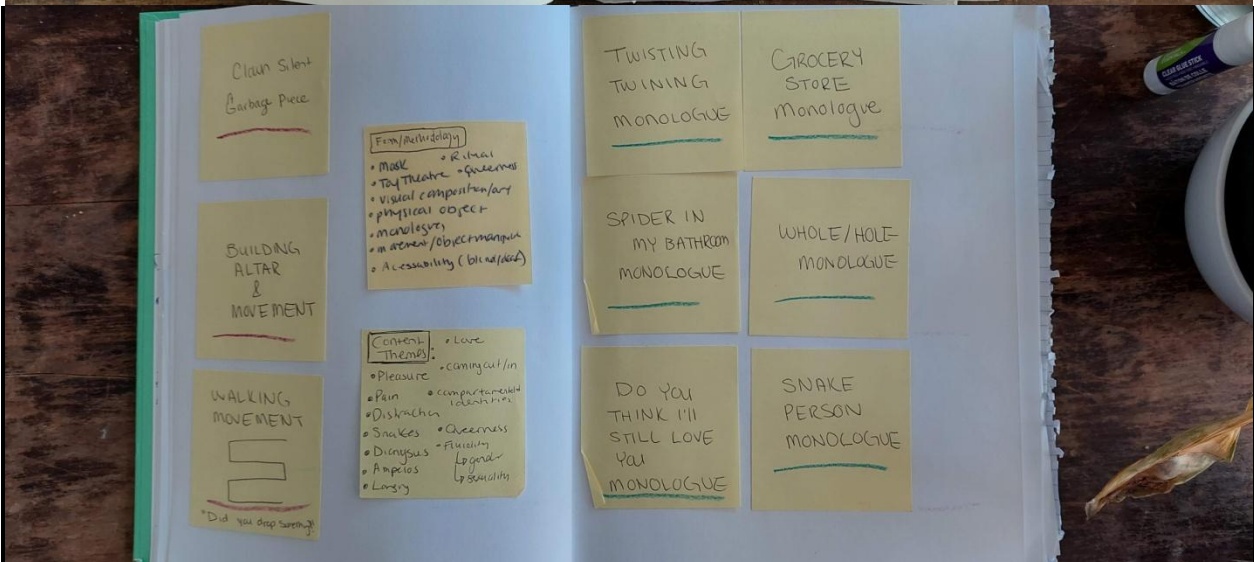
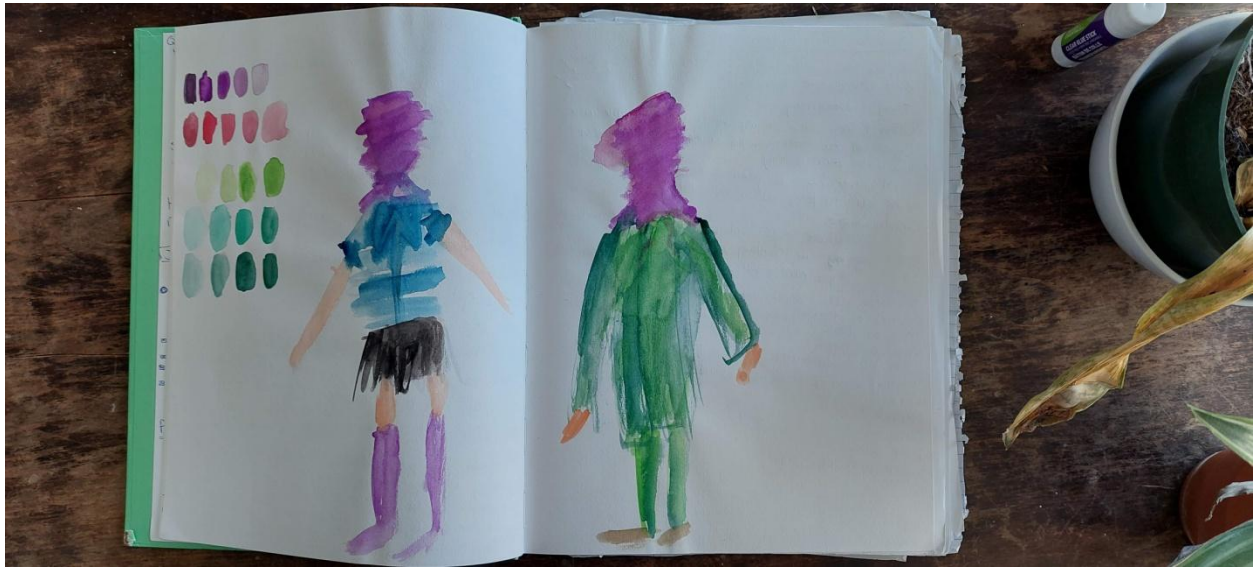
I felt that the environment was really positive which is what we have been trying to create this whole time - pleasurable and joyful in like stressful times.

May 19th 2021

So today and we recorded the show!! I did some test recordings yesterday and the day before to play with the audio to see how it sounds. I was played around with room tone which has been a big learning curve. I am grateful to Mandy for helping me figure out tone.

Today we work through the last scene with direction and then did some more audio tests. After that we just launched in. It was super fun and everyone said they were surprised how quickly and smoothly we worked through the show. I'm going to be looking over all the audio before I send the files to Sam for them to add in the other elements. We recorded most of the scenes only once but we did do a few of them 2 or 3 times. I plan to look over the files to do noise reduction and fix the room tone.

It was really fun and was fun to be directed and collaborate. It feels so crucial to have that when working on a one person show him yeah it's been nice so see all comes together and excited





& Set = a character = A person
 "Ree-Wee's Play House" → Falen's suggestion
 • color
 • lights
 • images
 • sounds
 • props
 • camera
 • lighting
 • Director's chair
 • Get costume
 • Props
 Need a budget
 per object.
 color scheme
 Careful you don't
 move away from
 central focus
 and into reality

Why do I need a set?
 - what is the central
 character?
 - who is audience to
 the character?
 - why do I need a set?
 - what is the central
 character?
 - Are there any
 doors or windows?
 - Exit through floor?
 - can characters leave
 world of
 - where they takes
 place over 43 min
 span (11th hour)
 - Stars sitting in
 chair
 - isolated weekend?
 - reflection of mind?
 - Duality
 - some only
 - more messy/chaotic as
 show goes on
 - Magical ventriloquist
 regular or back again
 - what technology
 exists in this world?
 - what communication
 does she have w/out it?
 - Liquor
 - Food (veg + veg)
 - real food
 - puppetry - some characters
 - some connected to projections
 - some things are things real food
 is fake but it's not
 as - something they think like food
 is real (Discovery)



BIPHASE	BISEXUAL	TRANSGENDER	TRITRICK LESBIAN
STRIPTEASE	AERIAL	BUTTERFLY	BEAR
PARADISE	POLYSEXUAL	BIBLISEXUAL	TRINITY
ABSTRACT	GENIUS	GENDER BINARY	GENDER FLUID
INFERSERIAL	MULTISEX	POLYANDROUS	AROMATIC
TRANSOMPHALIA	TRANSSEXUAL	TRANSSEXUAL	LYMBIC
TRINITY	TRINITY	LETTERS	BUTTER LESBIAN

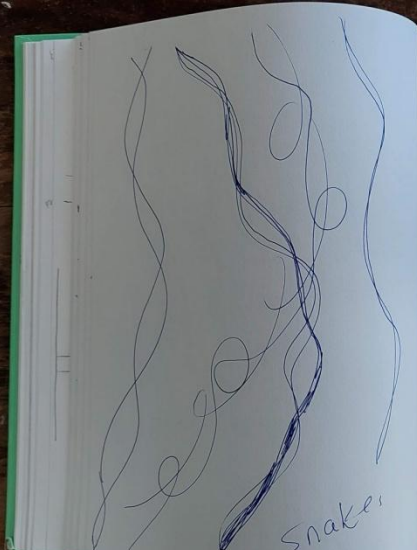
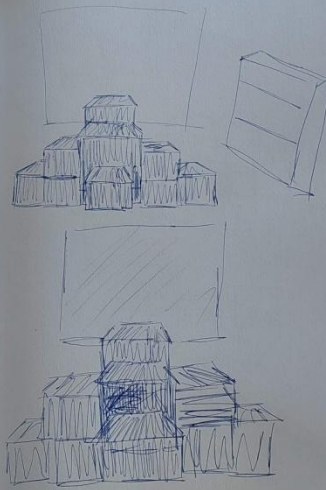
GENDERFLUIDITY
 A person whose gender varies over time, and may
 at any time identify as male, female, any other
 non-binary identity, or a combination.

Pleasure
vs
Distraction.

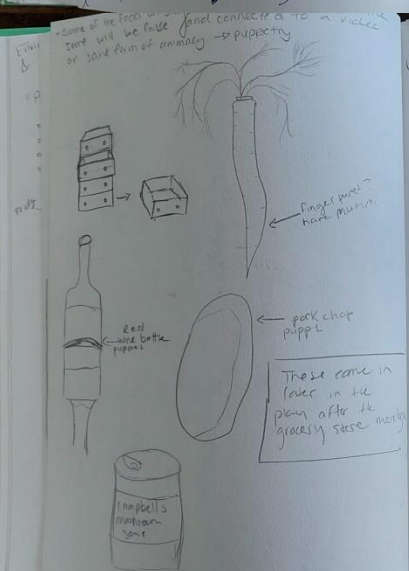
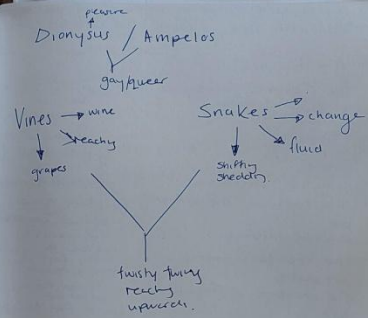
It needs to be in an apartment
where Ampelos lives alone and then
obsessed. It will help ground the
Snare in location and can be
hacked into.



-Dress
-which is interesting
can play with
distraction



Snakes



CULT OF DIONYSUS

no punishment

to ~~have~~ to be ~~be~~

Finding spiritually
2 ritual in dining,
greediness, analysis,
etc.

- Spring
equinox / post-reform
finishes

IDEN
wake up
hungry and with
carrots on fingers
being mean

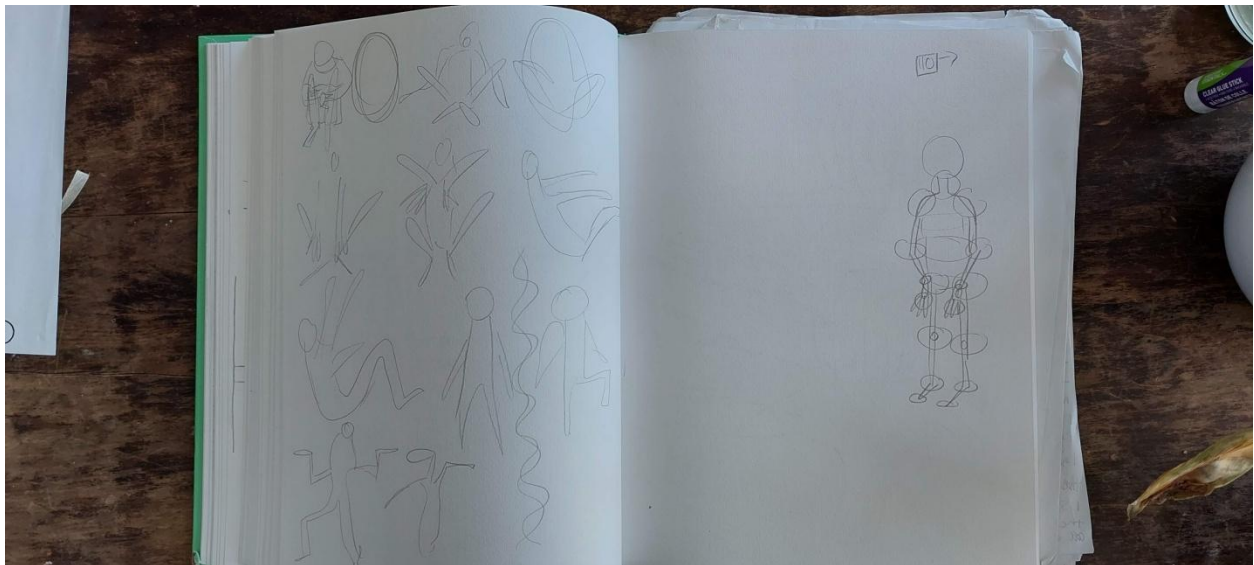
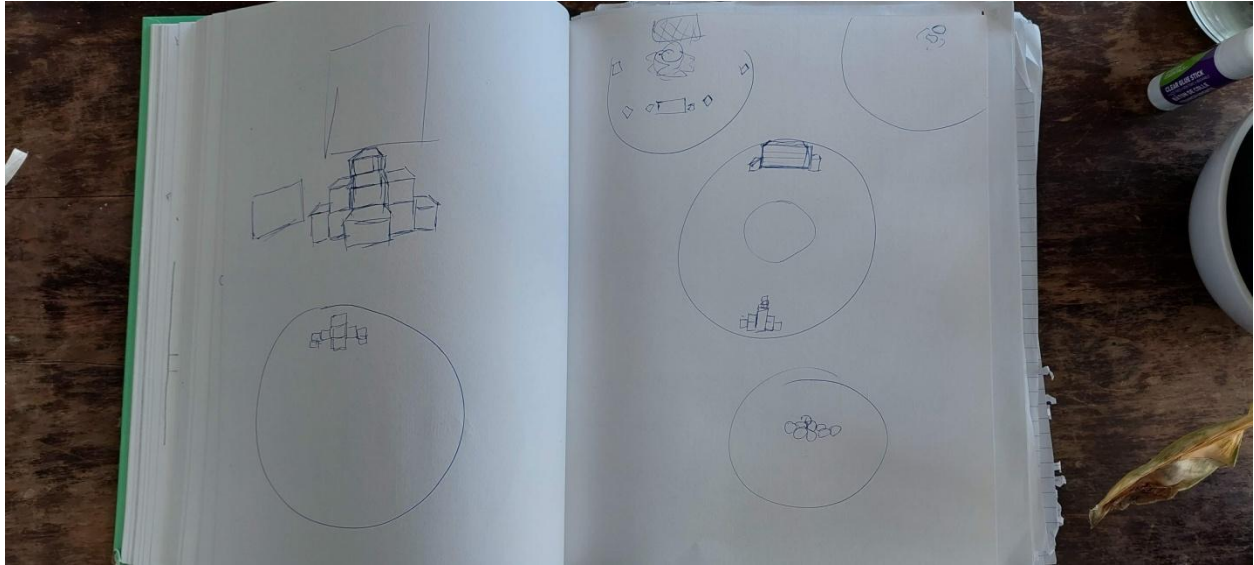
equal above in their
entire

Dionysus (Greek)
1) Drink
2) Queen
3) Madness
4) Treachery
5) Snake
6) Drama

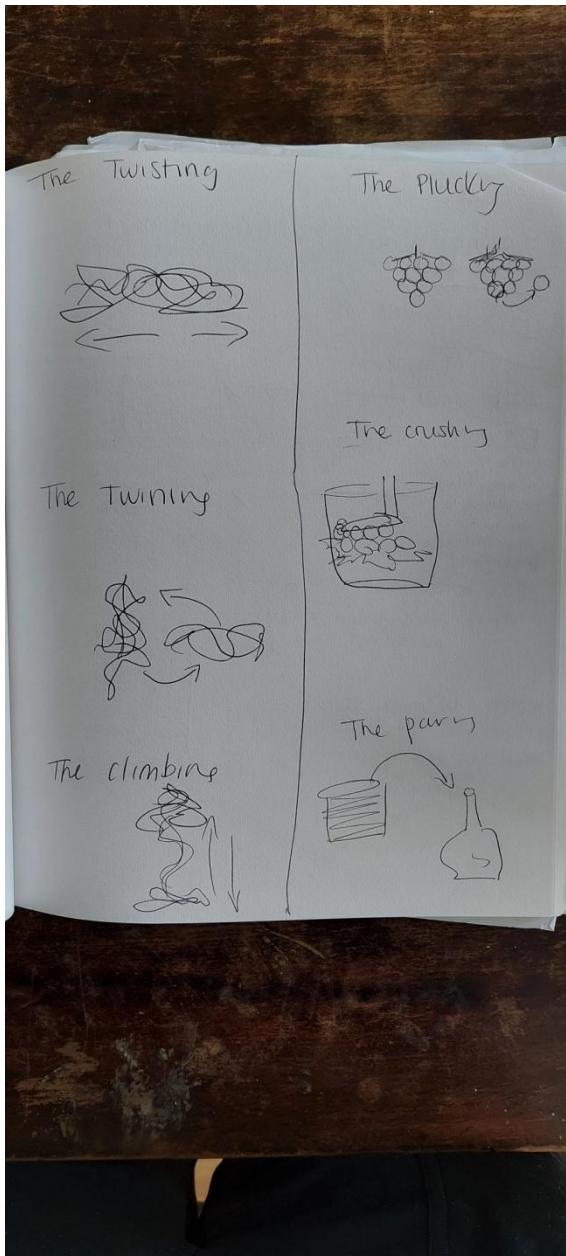
"Kithia Madness"
"Dionysus" - rising
"Dionysus" - rising

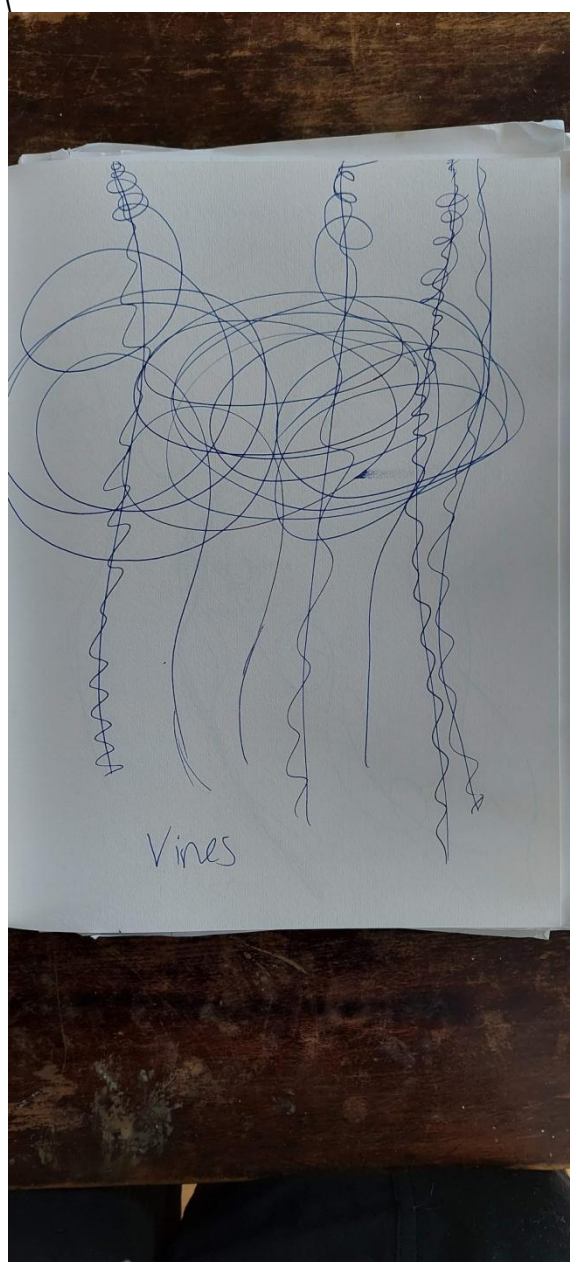
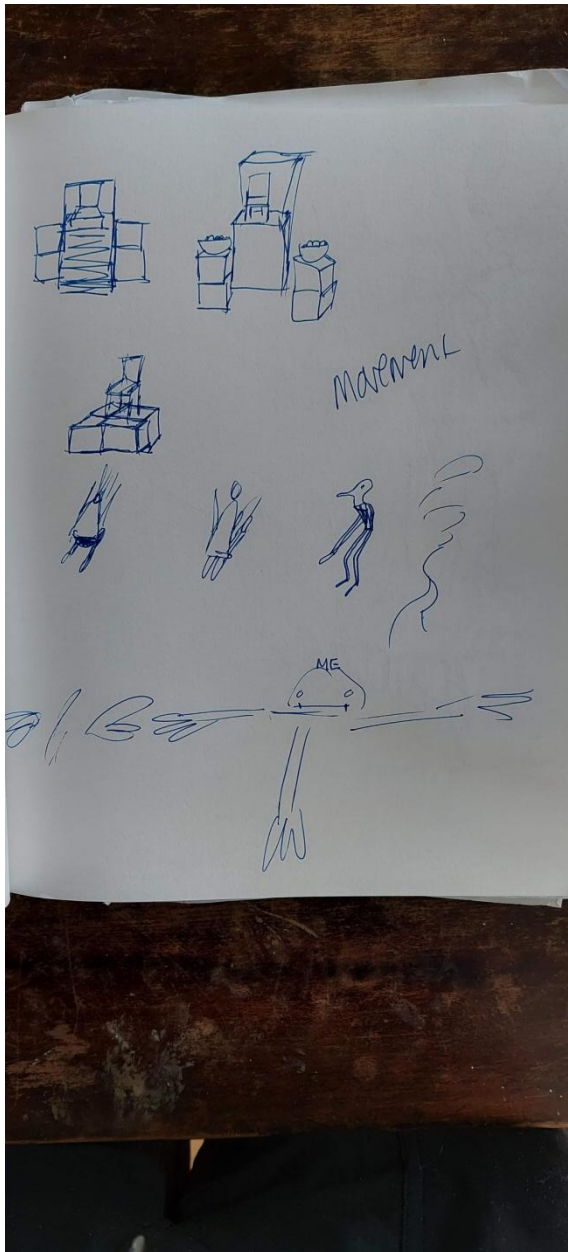
Open Ampelos
2 seconds
used meals
to worship while performing rites

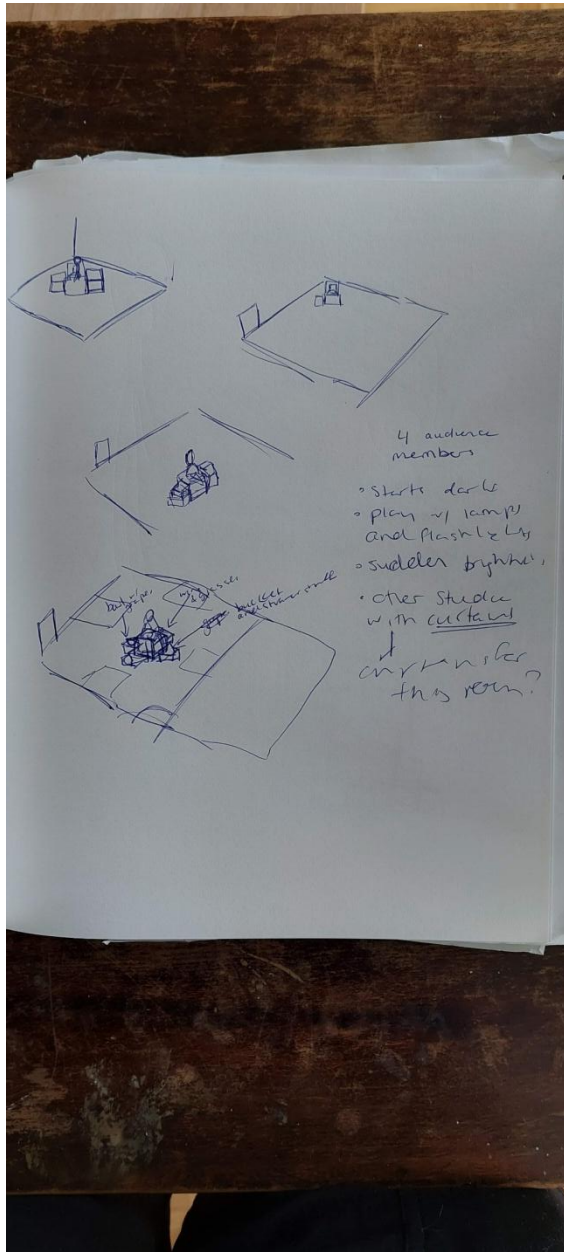
don't want
to be equal
to the gods
they can't be
to their own
to their own
to their own
to their own

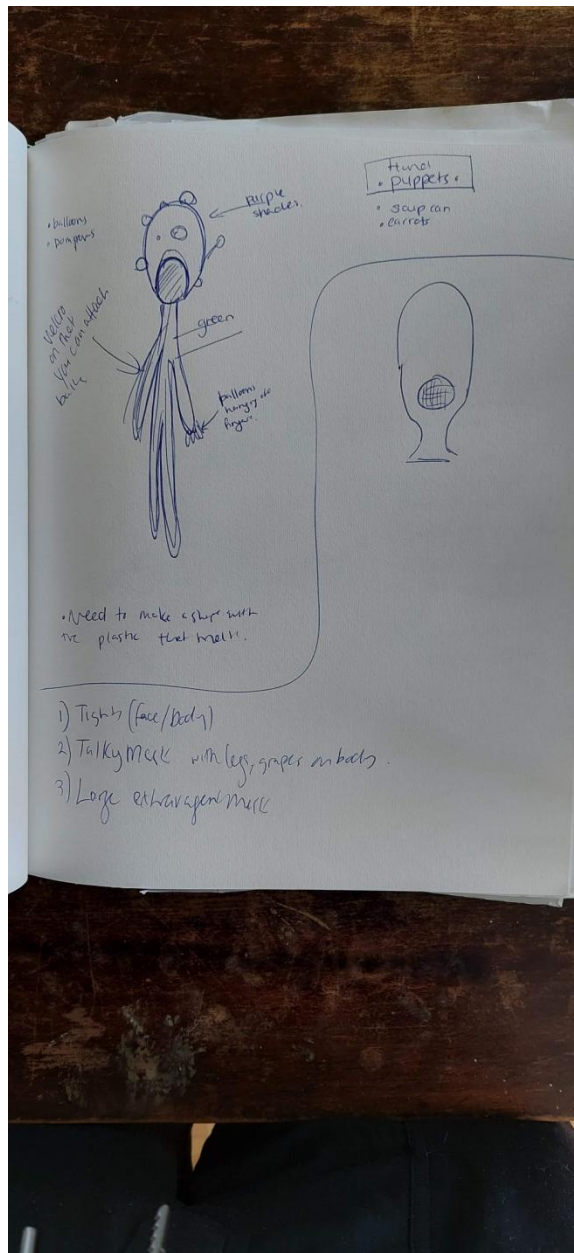
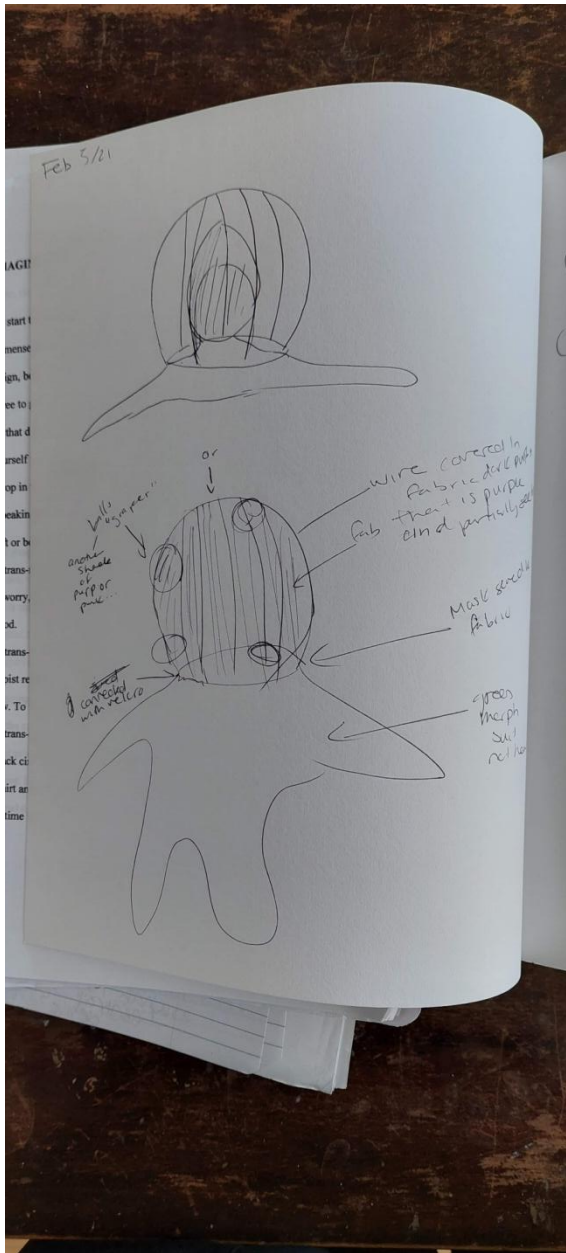












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