

Eat Me:  
Destabilizing Theatrical Forms of Representation  
in Order to Resist Reproduction of Prevailing Ideologies

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## Abstract

Eat Me is a praxis exploration in how to destabilize theatrical form in order for an artist to speak their truth as fully as possible. Inspired by the Italian Futurists, this journey takes into account different forms of post-dramatic theatre, and how they can be manipulated and received by an audience. This paper examines a queer feminist read of Marinetti's Italian Futurist manifesto and attempts to mirror this queer feminist lens in the rehearsal process as well as the final performance. The performance tells its story through bodies and cakes. The femme bodies continuously consume, even when it becomes harmful.

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## Part One: An Artistic Challenge

### Introduction

Avant-Garde theatre is difficult to define. Avant-Garde refers to new, experimental work, that is deviating from the norm. Within this working definition of the term, the comparison of the avant-garde to whatever is 'traditional' exists; however, 'traditional' theatre in Canada looks very different across communities. Based on my theatrical experience, traditional theatre is produced vastly by English speaking, white artists. Although the avant-garde theatre scene is plentiful, it has not yet achieved institutional recognition in Canada, (especially English-speaking Canada) as it has in the European theatre tradition. Some critics argue that this is because theatre in North America has developed alongside the film industry (Van Laarhoven). Similarly, Stanislavski acting technique and visuals of hyper realism have become the norm in North America (Van Laarhoven). Critics have discussed different audience reception of work (usually Canadians being grouped in with Americans) and in Van Laarhoven's 2017 article "In the Netherlands, the Avant-Garde Is the Establishment," he uses Ivo Van Hove as an example. He explains that Dutch audiences see Van Hove, "as 'rather mainstream,' ...But in the U.S. he is often labeled as a 'bad boy avant-gardist,' and praised for his unconventional approach to classical texts." European theatre culture seems to be far more advanced in terms of the theatrical avant-garde, and nearly twenty years ago, Hans-Theis Lehmann published *Postdramatic Theatre*, a publication which established a comprehensive vocabulary, and theories to be applied to when discussing this type of avant-garde work. Within this paper, I will be adopting Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre as the type of theatre in which I passionately reside in as an artist.

Postdramatic theatre has an incredibly intense relationship with the audience. This relationship is often defined differently for every artist and every production; however,

postdramatic theatre argues “that performance has the power to question and destabilize the spectator’s construction of identity and the ‘other’ – more so than realist mimetic drama,” (Lehmann 5). Every artist has a certain responsibility towards the audience. Theatre has the ability, unlike many other art forms, for real time, live discourse to happen between performer and audience. It is this very nature of theatre that makes me choose theatre as my medium in order to explore my artistic challenge: I want to destabilize forms of representation in performance in order to resist the reproduction of prevailing ideologies. In this paper, I will research forms of performance, and their attempts to seek truth and provoke audiences, and other artists that have resisted the reproduction of dominant ideas in order to fully understand the methodology that I will take into the rehearsal hall to create my thesis production.

### **The Neo Avant-Garde**

In 2006, Lehmann’s work was translated from German to English and provided a framework to begin to synthesize and share ideas about the highly experimental, avant-garde work that was emerging so strongly out of western Europe, especially from auteur directors such as Romeo Castellucci, Robert Wilson, and Jan Fabre<sup>1</sup>. Lehmann argues that this new era of theatrical work is “neo avant garde” (53). The postdramatic reaches beyond the post World War II infiltration of the avant-garde theatre in which we are familiar with. The avant-garde theatre

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<sup>1</sup> Most often when reading and studying about auteur directors, male names come up. We rarely hear about female identifying directors, and perhaps their work has not transcended internationally like their male counterparts, but it is important to recognize the unparalleled influence of directors like Joanne Akalitis, Anne Bogart and Marriane Mnouchkine. Interesting to note that this year at Avignon Festival only 2 sole female directors presented in the main festival despite the theme being ‘Gender’. In a New York Times Review by Laura Capelle entitled, “At Avignon Festival, Lots of Imagination on Show, but Few Women, Capelle laments: “Out of 28 directors or collectives in the theatre division, there were just seven women in the lineup at Avignon, the most important event in the French theatre calendar. Three of them were credited in tandem with a man; two presented their work in the small Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs, a venue Mr. Py [Festival’s Artistic Director] has set aside for family-friendly productions.”

was indeed revolutionary but still “the dominance of the text, the conflict of figures, and the totality of plot and world representation (however grotesque these may be) that characterize dramatic theatre remain intact,” (Lehmann 54). The theatre that I am interested in is void of this textual hierarchy which our Eurocentric theatrical traditions seem to be bound to. Lehmann’s monolithic study offers an “overview of the stylistic traits of postdramatic theatre,” that is not to be used as “a ‘check-list’ but as a companion for the viewing experience,” in the hopes that “a better understanding of postdramatic theatre can be gained” (82). Lehmann’s theory offers a way to bring critical language to the type of theatre that I am interested in exploring.

Lehmann begins his study with what he calls a “retreat of synthesis” (82). Lehmann suggests that this trait of the postdramatic is found through metaphor rather than aesthetics (82). Lehmann offers that if symbols and signifiers have been used in the theatre to help communicate synthesis, they can surely be used to retreat from this synthesis: “enclosed within postdramatic theatre is obviously the demand for an open and fragmenting perception in place of a unifying and closed perception” (82). In no way, does Lehmann suggest that the postdramatic cancel the mimetic nature of theatre, but rather manipulate the way mimetic signifiers communicate with an audience. This is Lehman’s way of describing a destabilization of representation. He explains that “synthesis is sacrificed in order to gain, in its place, the density of intensive moments” (83). This density of intensive moments seeks to glean a more truthful and full depiction of a moment that simple representation could never do.

## Searching for Truth

Postdramatic theatre gives me the tools to share my personal truth, in a way that I can't seem to express in traditional Western storytelling. As artists, we attempt to share our truths or ask questions about the human condition in order to affect some type of change in the world. The idea of truth, however, is so difficult to understand. Truth is subjective, and sometimes, even when we speak the truth, it becomes a lie. This plurality and complexity of ideas are able to be captured fully in the type of theatrical form I'm drawn to. In postdramatic theatre, I am able to speak four dimensionally, in a way that I feel restricted by in traditional storytelling. This ability to speak fully helps me to share myself entirely with my audience.

This idea of experimenting with new types of theatrical form is also an attempt at subverting tradition so that I can look for new ways to unbind myself from our patriarchal capitalist structure<sup>2</sup>. Not only is this important to me in performance, but this is very important to me during the process of creation as well. I attempt to feminize and queer my rehearsal process to reflect the politics that I want to see in the world. These politics within the process itself are intrinsically linked to the performance shared, and perhaps why I find such solace within this resistance of traditionalism. In this recreation of what is "traditional" I am able to build a new truth for myself, my ensemble, and my audience. This personal truth can cause obvious friction with witnesses that do not share my perspective; however, opening up a dialogue with artists and audience alike is crucial to the survival of theatre, as well as our growing politically polarized Canadian culture. This conversation can in turn help provoke an audience in order to shift their way of thinking.

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<sup>2</sup> In a speech at the National Book Awards Ursula K. Le Guin says, "We live in capitalism. It's power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art."

## Provoking the Audience

I seek for audiences to feel deeply— whether that be with detestation or adoration; whether that be with one hundred questions or one hundred answers. In Howard Baker’s prolific manifesto *Arguments for a Theatre*, he explains his idea of “Theatre of Catastrophe” as such (56):

### The Humanist Theatre

We all really agree.  
When we laugh together.  
Art must be understood.  
Wit greases the message.  
The actor is a man/woman  
not unlike the author.  
The production must be clear.  
We celebrate our unity.  
The critic is already on our side.

The message is important.  
The audience is educated  
and goes home  
happy  
or  
fortified.

### The Catastrophic Theatre

We only sometimes agree.  
Laughter conceals fear.  
Art is a problem of understanding.  
There is no message.  
The actor is different in kind.  
The audience cannot grasp  
everything; nor did the author.  
We quarrel to love.  
The critic must suffer like  
everyone else.

The play is important.  
The audience is divided  
and goes home  
disturbed  
or  
amazed.

It is only in this catastrophe that I can find what I am looking for. A countless number of theatre practitioners have searched for the followers to listen to their proclamations about provocation.

In Artaud’s much misunderstood *Theatre of Cruelty*, he explains that the cruelty is not that of blood, and “hacking at each others’ body parts,” but instead, “the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all.” (Artaud 55). This idea that the theatre should be cruel, and is there to teach the audience the artist’s truths is incredibly provocative. How as an artist though, do we help our audience listen to these truths?

Piet Defraeye, a Belgian theatre critic now working in Canadian theatre academia, published an article based on his research into theatrical provocation. He quotes the prolific Polish director Tadeusz Kantor's description of the space between audience and actors as "a moat in the zoo [which] guard[s] spectators from the attacks of wild animals"(163). Defraeye replies to this statement by explaining that, "provocation in the theatre finds its locus in the space between stage and audience, blurring and infringing on the protection offered by the representation, thus bridging the abyss and filling in the moat. It does this mainly by pulling the spectator into the dramatic conversation that takes place on the stage" (81). Much like Lehmann's suggestion for a retreat of synthesis in postdramatic theatre, Defraeye suggests that signs and symbols, offered in terms of representation are blurred. Defraeye offers that provocation occurs when an audience's protection that is built by the representation on stage is infringed upon. He does not call for total destruction of this representation, or even the space between stage and audience, rather he suggests to "build a bridge." To provoke an audience is not to push them away. The idea of provocation and pulling an audience in close is not a paradox, but rather, a necessity. This bridge building is perhaps how, instead of preaching our truths to an audience, we listen and learn together, with an audience.

A Canadian theatre critique, Mia Perry eloquently describes the challenges that the postdramatic has in terms of audience reception<sup>3</sup>:

In conventional theatre models, the experience of spectating performance is a very different one, as the form rarely invites a response or investigatory reverberations with regard to the content and aesthetic form. The conventional play or musical, in Aristotelian fashion, has a compact narrative, offering not only conclusions but, in the journey to them, enough conflict and drama to inspire emotional catharsis. All questions are resolved, all sentences completed, and every action tends to be accompanied by

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<sup>3</sup> Perry uses the term 'devised theatre,' and while devised theatre *can* be postdramatic, not all devised theatre *is* postdramatic and I believe this explanation fully relates to the postdramatic theatre rather than devised theatre.

reasonable logic and objectives. Devised theatre generally lacks this narrative structure, exposes the theatrical pretence of representation, and thereby prevents the audience from the emotional protection of catharsis. Instead, the creation encourages them to “witness” and take part in an event that will not provide an escape from the reality of their lives or encourage them to forget their own identities; it will not end in time for them to leave the theatre (70).

This description that this type of theatre “prevents the audience from the emotional protection of catharsis,” I believe to be an important subversion of Eurocentric theatrical form. How is it that we can welcome an audience to *not* experience the traditional catharsis in the theatre, and still feel as if their experience has been meaningful and worthwhile? In attempts to destabilize the form of representation, it is important to still take care of our audiences.

### **Early Subverters**

While researching previous artistic movements and theories that resisted prevailing ideologies, I was reminded of The Futurists. They were a social/artistic/political organization founded by Fillippo Marinetti in 1909 in Italy. Although I do not share the same political ideas as The Futurists, I became enamoured with the breadth of their ideas. They wrote Futurist manifestos about theatre, music, painting, architecture, food, clothing, lust, and more. I was especially interested in their passion for theatre, and in their Futurist Theatre manifesto, they explain: “The Italian spirit cannot be influenced with warlike strength, except through the theatre,” (Marinetti 142). Each point in the Manifesto begins with “It is stupid,” (see figure 1.0) and this type of tenacity in theatre enlivens me. Marinetti wanted to galvanize his audience and had many different techniques to do so. He sold multiple tickets for the same seat and put glue on the backs of auditorium seats. Marinetti argued that “it does not matter whether we are booted or applauded, what matters is that our programme is surrounded by a lot of noise and notoriety” (110). The Italian Futurists found themselves using theatre as an important technique

to disseminate their ideas where “the most effective weapons in their arsenal was provocation” (Kennedy 57). Their movement was about reaching their audience, and they did not do this through the content on stage, but rather, the traditions built around the Italian theatre. The Futurists often showed paintings and sculptures and read from their bizarre and unrealistic manifestos. Futurist scripts that were written by Marinetti, sometimes consist of half a well made play (in under four minutes), or a piece entirely acted by feet. The Futurists were not there to share their art, but rather “the main task of the declaimer was to challenge the spectators and to provoke them” (Berghaus 33). The hierarchy of the performance was toppled and “the spectator became the antagonist to the performer, audience reaction the text of the performance” (Kennedy 57). Although the Futurists were obsessed with provocation, they a) weren’t successful, and b) did not provoke through their art. Not only did the Futurists alienate the audience, but they created such hostile audiences that the Futurists were often ran out of town by a booing audience (Kennedy 58).

The Futurists are a great inspiration because even when the audience was upset, the Futurists still met their goal. There seems, however, to be an important balance between provoking an audience and upsetting an audience. When an audience rejects the art entirely, there is no room to question personal beliefs. This environment creates a binary: us vs. them. Although my goal is to destabilize performance forms, it is important to me that this be done with care, in order to open up the audience to listen to my personal truths.

## **Methodology**

It is now time to take this research into practice and create a performance piece. In my attempts to destabilize forms of representation in performance, I will look to adopt new ways of storytelling, and with that, I will borrow aspects from Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*: text, space, time, body and media. I am interested in mixing artistic forms, and balancing the worlds of performance art, installation piece, and theatre performance precariously. I hope that by doing this, I am able to resist the reproduction of prevailing ideologies, not only in theatre, but I want my audience to question their personal dogmas as well. This will call for some un-comfortability and provocation with the audience themselves. Unlearning is not easy.

## Part Two: Praxis Process

### Feminism and Futurism

Through my research into audience provocation, I delved deeply into the Italian Futurist movement. This movement idealized technology, mechanization and masculinity. My interest in Italian Futurism began specifically with their theatre manifesto, with their urge to “destroy theatre-technique, which— from the age of Greeks to present— has become ever more dogmatic, stupidly logical, meticulous, pedantic, and strangulating, instead of becoming simpler,” (Marinetti et al. 144). I was fascinated by their uncomplicated solution to most every artistic practice. However, their solutions had one major flaw: Futurism is rooted in deep misogyny. In the capstone manifesto written by Tomas Marinetti, but endorsed by many people, including many womxn, Marinetti says that the Futurists “want to glorify war...and contempt for women,” as well as “demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice,” (Marinetti 13). Before this manifesto, Marinetti wrote a novel called *Marfaka the Futurist* in which Gazourmah, the protagonist “is conceived without the help of the ‘maleficent vulva’ and is thus endowed with super human life,” (Whittman 413). He gains his power through never interacting with a womxn.

Although undoubtedly sexist, I wondered what the philosophies put forth in the early 1900s mean to me as an artist now. I wanted to see if I could take some of their theories forward into performance and what it would mean to create a current Futurist theatrical performance. However, I couldn’t help but be distracted by the bizarre ideas about gender and Futurism. I began to research the female identified party members and their writings and responses to Marinetti’s extreme sexism. Valentine de Saint-Point responds to his manifesto with “The Manifesto of Futurist Women.” Many scholars celebrate de Saint-Point as one of the only

feminist Futurists. Interestingly, de Saint-Point also shares some problematic ideas about Feminism in her manifesto: “But no feminism. Feminism is a political error. Feminism is a cerebral error of woman, an error that her instinct will recognize,” (110). De Saint-Point’s rejection of the political movement of Feminism, but her stance to still glorify femininity seems counter intuitive.

This specific manifesto became incredibly important to every phase of my creation process and was one of the elements that haunted me. I became obsessed with the idea of the “Futurist womxn” and what this could actually mean. I was fascinated with the pro female, anti-feminist stance that de Saint-Point holds. On one hand, her manifesto is filled with very relevant, third wave Feminist ideologies explaining: “[i]t is absurd to divide humanity into men and women,” (de Saint-Point 110). She would then counter it with discrediting “domestic women” and insists that feminism is an “error,” (110).

This incessant rhetoric of anti-feminist ideology comes coupled with her demand that womxn and men must both use femininity and masculinity to their own benefit. She explains that “[a]ny exclusively virile individual is just a brute animal; any exclusively feminine individual is only a female,” (111). The idea of “only female” resonates with me personally and artistically, and I began to wonder where my piece falls in de Saint-Point’s ideas of masculine and feminine. In her attempt to feminize the Futurist manifesto, she delegitimizes the female experience. Is it possible to employ Futurist ideology from a Feminist perspective? My very first workshop looked to explore this exact question.

In my praxis, I presented different workshops every three months. These workshops were practical presentations of ideas, images and questions that were prominent at the time of each presentation. Throughout these public presentations, my research was able to narrow and I

was able to clarify the specific content ideas I wanted to explore for my thesis, as well as how those ideas were received in both form and content by an audience. In this section, I will delve into each workshop presentation, and how each workshop, lead to the next piece, ultimately leading to my final thesis presentation.

## **The Workshops**

### *Material Girl: Futurism and Capitalism*

To begin the practical aspect of my thesis, I took my research on Futurism and my personal feminist lens into the rehearsal studio. I began creating images rooted deeply in these concepts while relating the Futurist readings to myself and to the current time period. I began looking for comparisons to our contemporary society and the Futurists, especially because so much of the Futurists' ideas of technology and automation have been fully realized in the twenty-first century. In the Futurist's later years, they begin to intertwine themselves closely to Italian Fascism, and our twenty-first century capitalist democracy attempts to be everything but Fascist. However, I believe that the Futurists would be incredibly satisfied with the way that our capitalist democracy has played out. It always encourages more growth, more expansion, more of everything, even if it causes irreversible destruction. I especially think of my home province of Alberta, one of the world's leading oil producers. I began to bring these ideas and images into the rehearsal studio, while especially thinking about my personal outlook on this highly capitalist, highly patriarchal world. I conceived and choreographed a piece with my colleagues performing. The piece was entitled *Material Girl*. It consisted of ten silent scenes that four performers moved through. Key images from this workshop showing were: a girl being served eggs by a masculine performer who continuously to eats them; outside forces, especially from

that of a talking computer, giving the humans instructions for money; a giant pair of lips speaking on the screen.

### *Futureland: The Creatures and Wonderland*

After the first showing, I knew I wanted to concentrate my next showing experiment on the specific creatures that enact the technologies control. They ended up being conceived as embodiments of the antagonist — not the antagonist itself. I continued to come up with three dimensional images but was working to find a way to filter and structure them. I went back to learning more about the Futurists, and especially female identified Futurists. I came across the poetry of Benedetta Cappa (see figure 2.0). The Futurists’ “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Poetry” sparked an abundance of experimental poetry, especially exploring the use of word placement on the page. Lawrence Rainey, a prolific Futurist scholar explains that the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature “demanded an unprecedented transformation of literary syntax, enjoining the elimination of adjectives, the abolition of adverbs, the removal of all connecting conjunctions (such as like), and the suppression of the first terms of a comparison in favor of a continuous image-flow, a language composed of pure metaphors.” (15). Cappa’s poetry excited me in two ways relating to my thesis: form and content. Firstly, I wondered if I could find a way to have “continuous image-flow” as a type of structure. Could I let go of the ideas of a narrative the way that the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature asks for, and create a piece of “pure metaphors”? This inspiration from the Manifesto of Futurist Literature sounds similar to Lehmann’s “retreat of synthesis” aspect of his theory and reminds me of my goal to destabilize forms of representation. Secondly, Cappa’s writing reminds me of the original edition of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Figure 2.1). I began to think of this story, and how the content of Carroll’s book may be an interesting dramaturgical structure, especially as I was

trying to explore “The Creatures”. These creatures are the entities that Alice interacts with along her journey. They are representative of the dark gloomy part of society, and hold little power. They are the pigs in the capitalist machine. I wanted to think about Alice being the protagonist, and meeting creatures along the way who were controlled by the Queen of Hearts (or in my case, translated to giant lips produced by technology: half human, half technological manifestation).

The two ideas about form and content were the ideas I brought into the rehearsal hall for my second workshop presentation entitled: *Futureland*. After holding auditions, I composed an ensemble of six performers. Elements that I created in *Material Girl*, seemed to fit seamlessly into the Wonderland world with which I was playing. I essentialized Carroll’s famous story into the themes that I was interested in exploring and brought those sections into the rehearsal hall. I wanted the entire piece to happen inside of a giant pipeline, and that instantly sparked my cast into thinking about “down the rabbit hole.” I began to watch different versions of Wonderland by different artists, most specifically the work of photographer Tim Walker, and the filmmaker Jan Svankmajer. Walker’s photography is filled with seamless fantasy. His images make Carroll’s world come to life, and somehow realistically depicts a fantastical world. What Walker especially reminded me of was Alice changing sizes after consuming the different ‘magical’ potions (Figure 2.2). This emphasizes the grotesque nature of fantasy and the nihilist perspective that the grass is never greener on the other side. Similarly, true to Svankmajer fashion, his film *Alice* reminds us of the absolute darkness that exists in the familiar. He uses handmade, eerily mundane puppets that are the characters Alice meets on her adventures (see figure 2.3). These puppets are juxtaposed by a few live bodies, including Alice and a pig. Casting Alice as a very young girl, especially one that doesn’t speak often, flattens the character by taking away any dynamic she may be portrayed within other stories. Svankmajer also concentrates heavily on the

dark, twisted, and untrustworthy creatures that Alice meets on her journey. Svankmajer's film is also completely without text. He uses Carroll's iconic imagery to help guide us through the journey. The piece takes place all in one house, and Alice explores the different rooms. Both of these ideas prove to be very influential (especially for my final workshop showing).

As rehearsals went on, the idea of consumption became important. I started to explore the idea of consumption as an intersection for both feminine bodies, as well as the oil industry. Important images and pieces that came from this workshop showing were: one of the creatures feeding an unwilling Alice, the powerful lips that reigned over everything, the sense of black nihilism that was pervasive both as a mood and color throughout the piece (mostly represented by black garbage bags). In this workshop, I concentrated almost exclusively on the creatures. This work made me realize that for the purpose of my thesis, I am not interested in the things that are controlling - I am interested in the girl who is being controlled.

### *Eat Me: Girlhood and Consumption*

Throughout the creation process, I continued to attempt to locate myself within my work. The "girl" inside of the story was me but only partially. In every piece, she was being controlled by an outside, patriarchal force. Although I, of course, feel the full effects of living inside a patriarchal society, what is scarier to me is the idea that the controlling misogynist creature lives inside myself. I began to shift my interest from the "wonderland" structure, to purely focusing on Alice as "girl."

I started to research about "girls," and especially the resurgence and claiming of the word "girl" in a third wave Feminist context. *Serial Girls* by Martine Delvaux is a fascinating journey in everything girl in the twenty-first century. *Serial Girls* explores the different versions of girl

in each chapter and “explores how these serial girls can be read as a form of resistance, representing real desires and refusing the limits of sameness” (Snowden). In Delvaux’s fourth chapter, she writes in depth about the idea of the ‘little girl’ and ‘dolls.’ This study would be incomplete without discussing Simone de Beauvoir’s conflation of the penis for little boys, and the plastic doll for little girls (de Beauvoir 340). De Beauvoir suggests that because girls are given little dolls:

for the woman there is, from the start, a conflict between her autonomous existence and her ‘being-other’; she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must, therefore, renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll, and freedom is denied her; thus a vicious circle is closed... (de Beauvoir 342)

Delvaux takes this idea further by comparing dolls for ‘little boys’ and dolls for ‘little girls’. She explains that “boys are given to play with, toys that are associated with heroic lives (ordinary ones- firemen, policemen, military men, etc.,. Or extraordinary ones- Batman, Superman, etc),” (Delvaux 24). Girls, on the other hand, are given “Barbie, who is, essentially, empty. A blank slate, a generic. All barbies mirror one another, and they are nothing but appearances and predetermined roles,” (Delvaux 24). This idea of blankness and emptiness became important to the characters (or lack of characters) in my piece. Would it be possible to inhabit this idea of emptiness in the performer’s characters? Delvaux asks if Barbie is the “[t]rue culprit or scapegoat,” (25)? These sentiments are echoed through her book, and the idea of blame becomes important in my piece. Can the powerful pink lips be blamed for what’s happening to the girl on stage, or is it her fault? Can we blame anyone for this story?

Pink became an important color in this iteration, and everything turned to pink-- the food, the props, the lips (which were previously red). In my search for learning more about “serial

girls,” from other perspectives, I learned of Tiquun’s Theory of the Young-Girl. In this collectively written book by Tiquun in semiotext(e)’s intervention series, they speak of ‘pink moralism.’ Pink is related to the over saturation of whiteness that we see in the beauty industry, and especially interesting to me as all my performers are white passing. In Theory of the Young-Girl they tell a story of speaking to someone who runs a department store who mentions that sales staff must have a “pleasant appearance,” (31). When asked what this looks like, he responds, “not exactly pretty. What’s far more crucial is... oh, you know, a morally pink complexion,” (31). Tiquun takes this remark out of its deep-rooted racism and calls it a “combination of concepts,” (31). They suggest that the patriarchy’s

morality must have a pink hue, its[sic] pink a moral grounding. That is what people responsible for selection want. They would like to cover life with a varnish concealing its[sic] far-from-rosy reality, (31).

These complicated ideas of the color pink are necessary for this version of my thesis. Even with all this racist, sexist, ideas of pink, is there also a way to reclaim the color pink to not only be a way the powerful control white womxn, but a way that all womxn reclaim strength in their femininity?

This was the first time in my research, and my artistic process, that I began to *celebrate* the feminine. I started to think about how the theme of consumption *affects* the feminine, and the feminine body, but what’s more, how consumption affects me. Early on I was fascinated by the idea that Valentine de Saint-Point, our ‘Feminist Futurist’ heroine, was devaluing the feminine experience when trying to feminize someone else’s art — and in a sense, I was doing the same. By placing the feminine body in a place of being acted upon and controlled, I was devaluing the strength and virility that girls possess.

I wanted to explore consumption in relation to feminine people in a capitalist-patriarchal society. Specifically, I wanted to concentrate on the cycle of consumption: we are told to consume more so that we can become more consumable. Womxn's bodies are consumed on a daily basis, by society through the control of the media. Conversely, in order to be as desirable as possible, we are told that we must consume more: buy more products, eat different food, wear different clothes. Therein lies the cycle of consumption. Consumption also becomes a tool for control that both the powerful and the disenfranchised use. Firstly, the powerful are able to create the feeling of voids, especially in the powerless, and the solutions to mend these voids are, of course, to consume more. In different circumstances, the disenfranchised use consumption as a way to gain control. The powerless are able to find ways to take back control from the powerful by being conscious about what and why they consume things: whether that be media, products, or even ideologies. This means that womxn *can* break the consumption cycle, but can we do it without becoming a cog in the consuming machine? While I explored this cycle in the rehearsal studio, a ritual began to emerge. A ritual of continuously consuming, and not being able to stop, no matter what the destruction. Consumption is never-ending— and therein lies the nihilism of consumption. This idea of a never ending ritual became a crucial storytelling feature in the final product of my piece.

I asked three of the performers from the first workshop back to help bring this new piece to life which I titled: *Eat Me*. We created a cycle of consumption and began to find ways by which that cycle progresses through time and space. We researched in the studio what happened when there are tears in the reality of the cycle: when the girl becomes conscious of her own consumption, and when she becomes conscious of her own control.

Finally, I began to think about the audience. In trying to ask the question, where does the girl come from, my first and strongest instinct is that she came from the audience. What would it mean if an audience is all cast as that character? How can you invite an audience to lean into the absurd and find that they too are located within the character? How can we celebrate the feminine in all? These questions lead me to create my final thesis piece that I will be sharing.

### **Rehearsal Technique**

Although each workshop produced vastly different shows, each process to get to these shows was quite similar. First, I would conceptualize, or dream up a specific frame for the piece to hang on. Usually, this would be written or storyboarded, and had textures and colours linked to the theme. Then as we commenced in the rehearsal hall, discussion and physical exploration started. My process attempts to oppose hierarchical structures in the rehearsal hall. I had many questions, but not a lot of answers and the other artists in the room helped me find my own answers. Throughout the entire process, themes, ideas, and motifs were becoming more and more clear and the heart of the piece was becoming more obvious. I liken this process to sculpting. I had to look at the heap of material from many different perspectives, slowly chiseling away until the material would begin to transform into something different. There is a moment when the artist and material both reflect one another. The art can finally be completed when both the material and the artist can reveal some new truth about the world.

## Evolution of Aesthetics

*Eat Me*'s aesthetics grew with every workshop showing, and as the images and story became more clear, so did the aesthetics (see Figures 3.0-3.5). Early on in the process, I was deeply inspired by industrial imagery. I dreamed that the entire piece would take place in a giant pipeline that was built on stage. Somehow the audience and our main characters could flow in and out of this pipeline, like going down the rabbit hole. I continued to explore this black, dark, nihilistic imagery through the use of smaller garbage bags stretched over a door and black corrugated construction material on the stage. At this point in my exploration, I was learning what did belong, and what didn't belong in the piece byways of intuition. During this phase, the femme character ate eggs that a male character cracked and cooked on stage. The destruction and cooking of the egg read very violent but juxtaposed against a very regular, domestic task. I was interested in this play between the domestic and destruction. During my research into the Futurists, I was reminded of the Dadaist film *Ballet Mecanique*, and drew a lot of visual inspiration from the film. In this revolutionary film, they often concentrate on a singular femme body part, zoomed in so close it becomes otherworldly. This is where I drew inspiration for the lips that control the performance. They began as an exploration of the inner workings of the femme character, but when seen on stage the lips had so much authority. The lips began to represent the patriarchy that governs the performance's world, but also, the inner misogyny that governs the femme bodies. I am reminded often that "white women are foot soldiers of the patriarchy," (Cox). What does it mean to have this variety of white, femme bodies governed by these lips? I was interested to search more into this.

As the piece developed, I continued to be interested in the texture of garbage bags. To begin with, the garbage bags were not played with as trash bags, but instead black plastic. I

played with moving body parts through the trash bags, and the holes that it left behind, often quite yonic. When working on the *Futureland* leg of the creation, I was especially interested in creating a truly future-like aesthetic, and the idea of this black plastic being the dominant material was incredibly attractive to me. The black plastic provided everything someone would need: clothing, shelters, and warmth. The plastic was an incredibly adaptable material. It was strong and could carry weight, yet could be easily perforated by a single finger. It could take up an incredible amount of space in the room, and conversely, the same amount of material could be shrunk down to mere shoebox size. The black plastic could fulfill almost all basic human needs except for one: food. What type of food would feed the spirit of this nihilist, futuristic catastrophe? Sugar. I began to explore different types of sugar in food and started to play with cotton candy. Cotton candy had some similar properties to the black garbage bags: it can take up a lot of space, but can also be condensed down into almost nothingness. It also meant that actors could have the possibility of eating mountains of cotton candy throughout the performance.

As the piece started to shift though towards following the story of the singular girl, the materials shifted too. While researching eating and food in a specifically theatrical tradition, I came across the celebration of Twelfth Night. In this British tradition, a bean would be baked into a cake and the person who found it would be king for the night. I found this fascinating. Traditionally, each guest would receive one slice of cake, and it's a game of chance, but what if you wanted power so desperately that you ate the entire cake in your search for the bean? What if that cake didn't have the bean, so you had to move on to another, and then another? This image of feminized power-hungry gluttony became irreplaceable, and the cake eating cycle was created.

While devising the performance, we realized how much waste is created during the ritual. This waste was not something that I wanted to hide, because the cumulation of the waste acted as a history. This assemblage of trash is a recreation of anthropogenic land mass. The garbage bags still hold all of the properties that I was interested in, but no matter the size of the bags, they always looked like trash bags— it became impossible to deny this.

The juxtaposition of the black garbage bags with perfect cakes was interesting to me. After being heavily influenced by Delvaux's theory and reimagining of "Serial Girls," I began to introduce the color pink into this monotone color scheme and everything began to come together. The pink disposable plates and utensils acted like a bridge to not only the plastic garbage bags but also to the cake. The cakes started off as entirely pink, with pink insides and pink icing— as perfectly pink as possible. However, a new image began to emerge: the performers imitating the cake. When we consume anything, that substance lives inside us: so, the more they ate the cake, the more they started to look like the cake. This meant that the cake had to begin in perfect whiteness, just as the performers did. Throughout the piece, as the cakes became pinker with sprinkles, the performers became pinker from the glow of the lights; until eventually, the entire world is one large pink garbage heap.

The evolution of the aesthetic is intrinsic to the development of the story. This story is told through cakes and bodies. The way the cakes and bodies look on stage, and the way their environment interacts with them, become the keepers of this tale. These aesthetic elements are heightened with the abolishment of theatrical text in the piece. The old fridge becomes a line in the story, punctuated with dirt marks and icing smears.

### **Part Three: Conclusion**

My first step into this journey was to find an artistic challenge that I wanted to tackle. When I started, my research question came pretty easily to me: how can I provoke an audience? Through my research, however, I learned that I knew how to do this already. Some of my artistic ancestors like Mabou Mines, Carolee Schneeman, and The Societas Raffaello Sanzio sat at the forefront of audience provocation; but it was then that I realized I wanted to more than just provoke. I wanted the audience to lean into my art through the provocation. Unlike the Futurists, I do not mark success by simply riling an audience up. I wanted to open up a conversation about the work, and the political ideas that surround the work, not push an audience away. With that, my next point of inquiry was how to provoke an audience without alienating them— but I needed to delve deeper into what I truly meant. What even is a provocation? What is provocative to one person may be entirely different to another. Also, if provocation was my goal, I was certainly not playing with it in the rehearsal hall. My academic research and my practical studio research were not in line. I needed to delve deeper into myself to truly understand what my artistic challenge was. I knew that I wanted to reflect my personal queer and feminist politics into a rehearsal process that would undoubtedly change the product being created. Time and time again, we see the representation of hegemonic ideologies in art. With my research into postdramatic theory, and especially Lehman's suggestion of manipulating the way we use mimetic signifiers, I began to think about my own personal way to destabilize forms of representation. Perhaps through this very destabilization, through a queer feminist lens, I would be able to resist the reproduction of these prevailing ideologies I see so often.

Throughout this process, it was incredibly difficult to find ways to play with the idea of representation in performance, especially within an institutionalized pedagogy. Although I

worked tirelessly to attempt new ways to destabilize representation, I feel like often my focus was split in different directions. Because it was not a concentrated creation period, but rather a period where a lifetime of knowledge was gathered, I was less fixated on applying my artistic challenge to my piece, and more concentrated on gaining the multitude of information that I could learn from my two years in the MFA in Theatre at York University. This meant trying different rehearsal techniques, different ways to create and think and direct, which often made me excited about a different aspect of my work as opposed to my central research question.

After presenting my piece in its current form, I am able to reflect on this experiment and what steps to take next with my artistic challenge. Throughout this process, I have solidified my current adoration for postdramatic theatre. I am excited to continue to explore this form-shattering type of performance. The need to categorically label art is so interesting to me. I understand that it is a way that helps an audience to comprehend a piece, but many of my audience members seemed to struggle with my work as a piece of theatre— a struggle that I too experienced. Many told me it was ‘performance art’, or encouraged me to present it as an ‘installation piece,’ or perhaps ‘multi-media art,’ and although I’ll admit that the piece is at an intersection of all these types of art, I made an incredibly conscious and informed decision to call it theatre for two major reasons. Firstly, the piece progresses over time, and I was interested in the experience of the audience with that journey. In a theatre piece, the audience is relegated (more often than not) to sitting in their seats to watch the performance. Each unit that existed in my performance was two minutes long, but the time in each unit seemed to pass so differently. Sometimes it seemed as if the unit passed quickly, and the performers were so quickly on to the next section. Other times, I feel like I was begging for the performers to do something different, to make a change, to stop eating. As a director, it was difficult for me to live in this discomfort,

and balance my experiment with the risk of having a boring performance. These two minute intervals are something that needs to be experienced by a viewer from their singular perspective, over a specific period of time. Installation art and performance art also often progress through time, but usually, a viewer only experiences that in retrospect as the progression takes hours, or sometimes weeks<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly to my decision to present this piece as a theatrical performance, theatre is the medium I am trained in, and that is the medium I am responding to. I realize that this piece might easily fit into a gallery setting, especially depending on the direction that the next iteration takes, but I am responding to the tradition of theatre. The avant-garde cannot exist by itself: experimental work is only named for the ways it responds to art that precedes it. This interaction gives my piece even more depth. The fridge slam is not just that of a fridge slamming, but also an echo of the door slam in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The cakes are inspired by the British tradition of Twelfth Night cakes, and the themes in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* are also interesting in response to the piece: Malvolio believing he can be a nobleman and gain power, and Viola disguising herself as a man. Although the depth of these images is not communicated directly to the audience, I believe that placing this piece in conversation within the theatre deepens the images, even if that depth is, at this point, just for myself and my performers. Each image does not sit alone but instead is responding to centuries of predominately white, male theatrical canon.

The plurality of these images and the depth of research did not necessarily show in the piece. I don't believe that highlighting the depth of my research is necessary, but I do believe that in my attempts to make a completed piece with an impenetrable concept, I neatly packaged the performance into a place where there was little room for mess (ironic as that is in relation to

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<sup>4</sup> I am obviously speaking incredibly generally, and like myself, there are artists that play with these very expectations but may still label themselves as an installation artist, or performance artist.

the piece that I created). For example, all performers entered the space from the audience, but one performer wasn't ever able to complete her entrance. This element expanded on the idea of entering from the audience, and I am hoping to do that with even more images. Having one person stuck in the audience created a connection between the performer's space and the audience's space. I wonder as this piece continues forward, are there even more ways to blur these lines? Her constant entrance also acted as an element that as an audience member I could decide to watch and take in, or could decide to ignore. These types of storytelling additions give more depth to the piece and are examples of what Lehman suggests as the "density of intensive moments," (83). In my editing away of what felt like excess, I lessened the density of these moments and therefore exposed less of my own truth in the telling of this story. I am excited in further iterations to break open the piece. I want to investigate each layer of the images further queering the performance, rather than presenting just one image of the piece as a whole.

There are, of course, multiple ways to proceed with this project, but I am most excited to continue to explore the audience's relationship to the piece. Going forward, I want to further attempt to blur the lines between spectator and performer, but in a way that is consensual and not exploitative of the audience. This journey has been incredibly fruitful and taught me ways to speak about my work and my process that I didn't have before— the power of language is incredibly important. The same way that feminist theory and queer theory help us to have poignant conversations about privilege and power, I hope to continue my own journey in creating art that attempts to open up the space for these conversations, and gives voice to other queer femmes. I want to move further in this direction to continue my journey of destabilizing the form of theatre as an institution in hopes that I am able to inject my personal ideologies into my art.

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## Appendix A: Image Inspiration

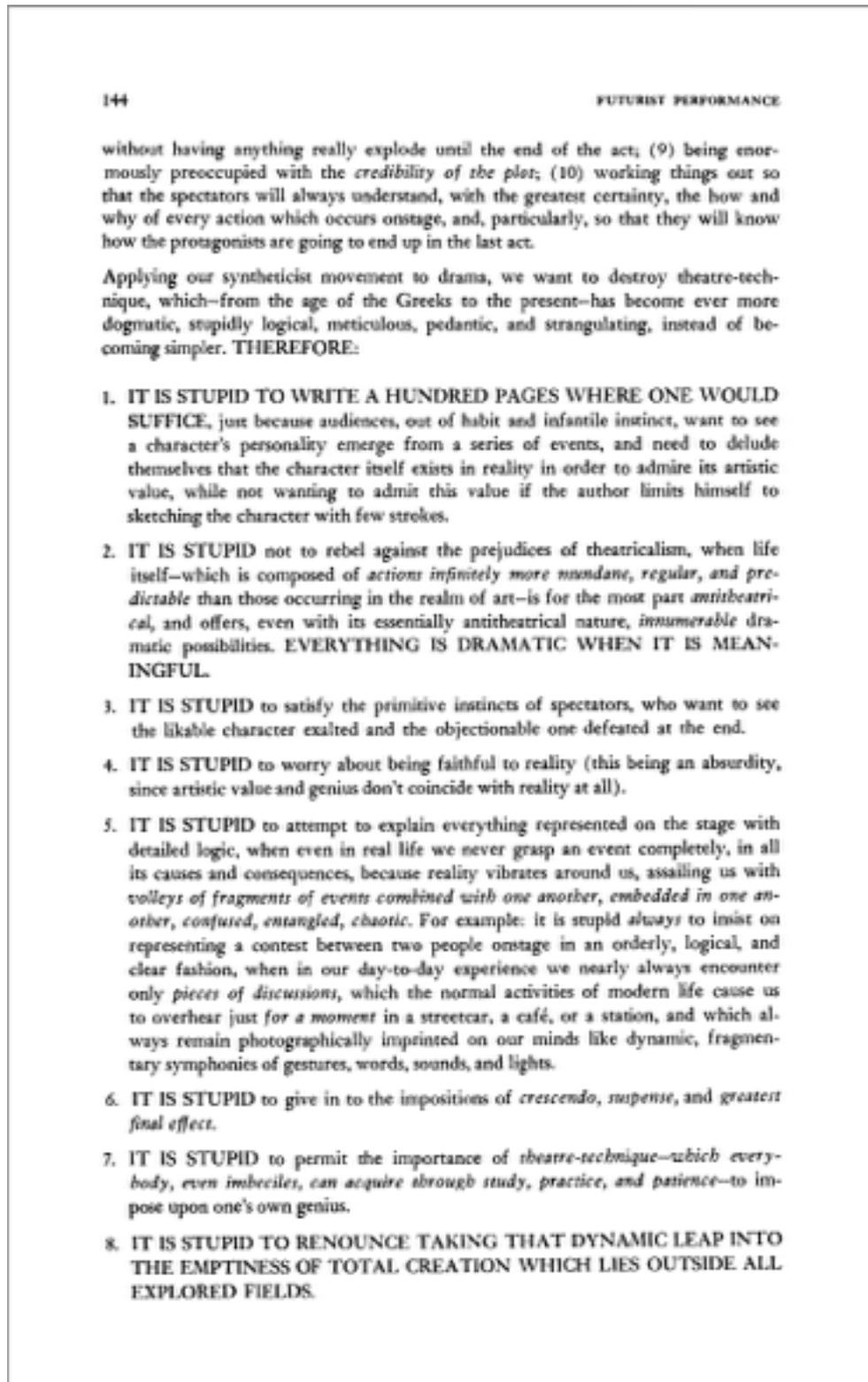


Figure 1.0 Marinetti's Futurist Theatre Manifesto (142).





Figure 2.2 Tim Walker's Alice (2004)



Figure 2.3 Jan Svankmajer's Alice (1988)

Appendix B: Workshop Presentation



Figure 3.0 *Eat Me* (2019).



Figure 3.1 Performer Samantha Wymes in *Eat Me* (2019).



Figure 3.2 Performer Patrick J. Horan in *Eat Me* (2019).



Figure 3.3 Performer Catherine Vielguth in *Eat Me* (2019).



Figure 3.4 Performer Patrick J. Horan in *Eat Me* (2019).



Figure 3.5 Performer Samantha Wymes in *Eat Me* (2019).

## Appendix C: Journal Entries August 2018-March 2019

### August 2018

Workshops began for me today on what will be my thesis performance. Although I am still experimenting, I am now experimenting more intentionally. My first year was exploring materials and feelings and images, but I now have an idea of the palette that I am painting with for this piece.

These series of workshops are to explore the idea of flipping the garbage bag door frame to be the entire floor. I think that this could be really beautiful and meaningful, but I don't know yet how it would work. The idea of the black hole appearing from the ground, and all the performers coming from that I think is stunning. It really plays into this down the rabbit hole, tar sands, black hole world. Something that is like black matter that conquers everything. It's a way for me to illuminate the darkness. It would be amazing for an unprecedented amount of performers to come out of this darkness. I think maybe the piece lives on top of this dark garbage bag/false floor also.

Because I wanted everyone to come out of the garbage bags, I realized I would need one giant sheet to cover the entire space. This would work well in the Theatre Center space as they have the sunk-in pool-like playing area in the Incubator. It might be really difficult to source (and expensive) a giant piece of black rubber, so I started playing with different materials. I was thinking I could make a quilt instead of a seamless piece of fabric. I like the idea of this quilt being made of different materials, and some performers can break through some parts, and other parts can't as easily break.

I brought in a few prototypes to rehearsals today. I brought in these giant black plastic paint drop cloths I purchased, and I also mocked up some black quilts that I created with

different materials. The huge issue we are having is that it is very difficult to rehearse this.

There is essentially no way to recreate a sunken floor. We used boxes and weighted them down, and stretched a piece of plastic to each corner, but even those moved. The images that we were creating were really interesting, and we found new ways to do images and sequences that are already built, but I am not sure how to do it for my showing up at York. It's a really interesting idea, and I'm not ready to let it go yet, but I'm not sure how to practically do it.

### **September 2018**

Rehearsals are now in full swing on a weekly basis. I really enjoy having a longer period between each rehearsal. It gives me space to breathe and create and consider the discoveries we make in rehearsal and then, come back prepared for the following rehearsal. In the future, I would love to continue to create like this.

I'm not sure that I am driving my proverbial boat in the right direction. It's a pleasure to have Sami and Catherine in the rehearsal hall and to have built a rehearsal language. We all work really well together, and I feel like there is so much space not only for ideas but discussion and attempts around those ideas. I'm learning to trust their instincts more as rehearsals go on, which is exciting.

If I continue with the false floor, it creates an underworld vs. earthly dynamic. I'm trying to figure out why the characters leave the world, and if they go back under. Also, what is the world underneath, and what is the world on top? Although I am not sure it will be shown, we started playing with the world that is underneath. It's living in a bit of a clown world that is not as interesting to me-- it seems so obvious. There is no oil and vinegar, only oil right now.

Nothing to rub up against the bits of the piece to make it move and shake. There is no friction. Nothing upsetting the piece. It's too easy right now, and I need to keep searching for why that is.

## **October 2018**

I have been musing a lot about my premise and my central dramatic question. 'Consumption leads to destruction', or 'women consume and are consumed', or 'in order to create we must consume', or 'we consume to gain control': all too general, all not right, or what exactly I feel is in my heart for this piece. I am having troubles really discussing what I want my piece to be about. There are so many things that we talk about and I read about that I feel like ah yes, there is my show. But I need to sit and breathe and remember that not all of it fits, and not even all my interests fit into this show. Because I have been inside this show for so long I feel guilty for being interested in literally anything else. The "universal to personal" exercise is hard for me right now because the universal is personal.

I've invited Patrick back to come to play in the rehearsal hall. It's been really nice playing with Sami and Catherine, I'm not sure I have ever rehearsed a full piece with only two womxn before. I do think we need another performer though, and I have an image of a clown/ ringmaster/ narrator/ bearded drag persona to control the quilt and therefore the world. I think they could be sitting there, building the quilt the entire show. Patrick can also play the accordion, and I would love to include some live music.

I've been thinking about the genre of fantasy, and how it is perhaps an interesting frame for this piece. Fantasy is about altering something unpleasant and making it pleasurable. How can one womxn do that to the world around her? How do we do that every single day?

**November 2018**

Things have changed a lot for me. Hundreds of images and pictures and ideas and dreams have been flying around in my head, but I haven't been able to make any of them land. I think that I'm also really feeling pressure from creating a piece for my graduate thesis-- it's really intimidating. I also feel frustrated that I am feeling this pressure, and I feel like I'm in a weird place to create. I've never once felt so much like a stereotypical artist. I'm in the studio for hours, painting and drawing and doing yoga just before I begin to think about my piece. It's both a luxury and a curse. I normally create in situations where I am balancing three jobs and balancing a full cast (and all of their jobs too) in a tiny rehearsal slot for a few hours in an unfinished basement. I don't mean to complain about having the luxury of time, but it's a way of creating that is so different to me.

Because I have this balance between so much time, and no time at all (it feels like right now), and how uninspired I feel by some of the product I'm creating in rehearsals, I decided I needed to do a reset. I took a day retreat. I bought a new notebook. I left my computer at home. And I found a new, quiet café I had never been to before. I attempted to start at the beginning (although there is no beginning, all the work I have done to this point is engrained into my body and brain and soul) and tried to find a way to most simply tell the story I want to tell.

There's a girl. She begins to eat cake, and she can't stop. There are different versions of herself that watch her eat the cake. She becomes conscious of this. She still eats the cake. The more cake she eats, the more she looks like the cake. A part of her then begins to devour herself; confusing herself with the cake. She is cake and cake is her. She eats until she's devoured. She's consuming and consumed. She's gone.

**December 2018**

The showing went well, and I was able to experiment with exactly what I was interested in experimenting with: how long can an audience watch something for? I was really excited to get feedback about this new idea about cake eating. This is really different compared to the other things I have shown, but still in the same universe as before. I attempted to collage in different images and pieces that we previously created-- I did this too last minute for this showing, but I still wanted to get feedback about them within this world.

I know the work I need to do now. I'm excited to more cohesively progress the piece forward, and to include other images I have previously created. I want to tightly choreograph the ritual so that it is exactly the same for all the performers. I also think it's funny that all three of them look so similar. They are so obviously the same person to me. I want to dig into that more. I think that something can be deepened and strengthened is the ritual/cyclical nature of the piece. My dream is to have 100 people enter and do the ritual because I'm not sure why I stop at 3 right now. The cakes are also not exactly right, but for now, they will do.

**January 2019**

I've started to have a few rehearsals, but the major part of this month has been writing my paper which has been so important to my artistic process. I realized that I don't think my artistic challenge is, in fact, my artistic challenge. I know how to provoke an audience, I've done pieces like that before. Why did I say that is my artistic challenge, and why aren't I actually doing that? I know I am interested in the audience, but I am not sure as to what extent. I feel a constant pull. On one hand, I feel like an artist has to create while thinking about their audience, because if it's

not for an audience then I feel like it's therapy. The audience is what makes the art actually art. A crack in the floor is only a crack until an audience looks at it and decides to call it art. On the other hand, I feel like an artist must not think of her audience. Reception shouldn't matter, but instead, she should create how she feels, what she sees, and ultimately what she feels like she needs to create, audience or no audience. I'm not sure if it's possible to be in between these two extremes. I feel like the answer can't be both, but I don't know what the answer is.

## **February 2019**

Today was very different than I expected. Today was supposed to be my very first rehearsal with the additional chorus of performers that I assembled. Altogether, there would have been 12 performers in the piece. Through a series of personal emergencies, and last minute scheduling conflicts, only two of the additional performers were able to attend, and I was made aware of this very early the day of the rehearsal. I called off those two people (it just didn't feel right to me to have only two new people there). The universe has told me that adding these people was not the right thing to be doing in this iteration of the piece. I also needed to have this rehearsal with the entire company, and don't have the resources to add more rehearsals. The idea of the girl forever entering from the audience simply can't happen anymore. I had to quickly move on from this crisis. Why do the performers stop entering? There needs to be a reason. Also, why do the performers become conscious of each other, and conscious of the audience? The easy answer is the lips, but I think that might be a bit of a cop-out. It's not nuanced enough of an answer, but I fear that with so little time left, I may need to make that my answer. I would rather concentrate on performance than concept so late in the game, and I'm thrown off that I need to rethink this kind of stuff.

**March 2019**

We did it! I feel so proud that I was able to pull off this performance the way I did. I went through tons and tons of design challenges, but I feel like, at the end of the day, the piece looked incredibly beautiful, and really shows the aesthetic potential it could have in a theatre space. I was really challenged by the subtraction of performers, and I think the “glitch” solution provided an interesting texture to the piece. I think that the piece needs more of that now. I think that in my attempt at clarity, the piece became singular rather than a celebration of plurality. I know that there were a lot of aesthetic textures but I think I need to infuse more textures and dissonance in the images to create a more full piece. I am also excited to experiment more with the audience’s role. Because only 4 actors entered from the audience, I wasn’t able to create a feeling like anyone could enter the playing space at any time. I also haven’t succeeded in creating the type of atmosphere that I am interested in. I can’t wait to get into rehearsals and keep playing. The tech elements truly became important as they were storytelling features for this performance, so I’m really excited to be able to have more resources later in April.