

**Mapping the Queer Ephemeral**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks to define/theorize and map the queer ephemeral, a cycle of emergence and reemergence of the queer subject within queer time. Straight time consists of the linear timeline where when one matures, attends college, attains a stable job, falls in love, marries, bears children, and lives happily ever after. Whether through movies, television, books, or our own guardians, time is presented to us as something stable, consistent, and reproductive; diverging off the conventional timeline brings societal pressures that isolate subjects who fall out of its fabric. As straight time facilitates the construction of some sort of ideal adult, it also allows the emergence of queerness as queer time naturally stands in opposition to reproductive lineage.

As straight time grants one emergence of the adult, queer time enables multiple possibilities of self emergence. Throughout this thesis, I define that this cycle of self emergence, known as the queer ephemeral, is fleeting in nature, which subsequently causes the queer subject to constantly feel as if time is always slipping through their fingers. I seek to map critical examples of the queer ephemeral by categorizing and defining its fragmented and ever-changing structure through the affectual terms of emergence, ecstasy, grief, and utopia. Through “Emergence,” I pay close attention to Venezuelan performance artist Arca as a manifestation of the queer ephemeral. Through “Ecstasy,” I analyze Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography* in relation to the paradoxes that exist within queer engagements of queer nostalgia, a critical player in the pattern of ephemeral emergence. In “Grief,” I discuss grief in relation to Susan Stryker’s definition of transgender rage and the 2017 Chilean film, *Una mujer fantástica* (A Fantastic Woman). Grief emerges as a crucial generative aspect within the queer ephemeral.

Finally, in “Utopia”, I pay close attention to the late electronic music artist SOPHIE and her album, *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides*, which emphasizes the immateriality of queerness and the utopias that are constantly constructed and deconstructed. As each of the subjects in this thesis engage with the queer ephemeral in different and unique settings, they all come to consistently manifest a state of becoming. While the term mapping implies that the exact coordinates of the queer ephemeral can be identified, this thesis manages to approximate the queer subject’s fleeting existence.

## Forward & Acknowledgements

I have always been good at direction. Whether it is knowing the correct turn to take or the hidden shortcut no one knows about, I find pleasure in correctly mapping my journey to a desired location. When my sense of direction fails me, in instances when I hop on the uptown line or take the wrong exit on the freeway, I get incredibly frustrated, as anyone does. Sometimes these blips of a lost sense of direction disorient me completely and I have no idea where I am.

Growing up gay in Upstate New York consisted of a lot of mapping. When I had come into my identity, I started imagining what I wanted my *new* life to look, feel, and act like. When I think of moments where my queer utopia was in sight, a place where I didn't think twice about my identity and where I felt utterly complete, it almost never existed in places that were close to me. I remember feeling empty and fragmented when I would return from a place where I felt present in a queer collective. Whether it was the potential to meet a partner, be friends with those that shared similar stories to myself, or feeling safe, my idealized form of my queerness became fleeting. My craving for moments when that utopia fell into arm's reach became an emotion that both pushed me into the future but also projected me into the past through overwhelming episodes of nostalgia. My frustration with my own ephemerality became a dominant emotion in my life. In turn, I felt driven into locating moments that were stable and consistent. I became afraid of my fleeting queerness and tried to escape its ephemeral existence.

When I started to realize that with every fleeting moment of ecstasy and euphoria that I felt, I emerged as something or someone new, I began to willingly wade in the waters of the queer ephemeral. When I began to look back at where my queer story started to where it is now, I noticed that I was constantly *becoming* into my queer self and still am. My queerness does not stop becoming when I tell it to or when society tells it to. My queerness is not just one thing. When I repeat these words to myself, when I actively swim in the deep waters of my fleeting existence, I emerge again and again and again.

Throughout this thesis, I felt a deep affinity towards the pillars of emergence, ecstasy, grief, and utopia that exist within the fabric of the queer ephemeral. Below each of the chapters, I have placed coordinates of where I have fell into the queer ephemeral's tight grip and allowed myself to be pulled and pushed by its vast extremities. They are places that have shaped me into who I am now, in this very moment.

I would personally like to thank Professor Jennifer Mitchell and Professor Jenelle Troxell for embarking on this journey with me through the queer ephemeral. Thank you for offering a second and third pair of eyes on this project, for validating my theoretical thread, and for supporting me throughout a time that felt as fleeting as ever. In its final form, this project could not have existed without either one of you.

Now, I invite you into the vast realm of the queer ephemeral.

## Mapping the Queer Ephemeral

In Jack Halberstam's *In A Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, he describes heteronormative time in relation to emergence, writing, "we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life, and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity" (4). Halberstam implies that heteronormative time is founded upon routine and repetition. We all are familiar with the linear timeline where when one matures, attends college, attains a stable job, falls in love, marries, bears children, and lives happily ever after. Whether through movies, television, books, or our own guardians, time is presented to us as something stable, consistent, and achievable; diverging off the conventional timeline brings societal pressures that isolate subjects who fall out of its fabric. Thus, as heteronormative time allows the emergence of some sort of ideal adult, it also allows the emergence of queerness as queer time naturally stands in opposition to reproductive lineage.

Halberstam elaborates that queerness is born out its incapability of fitting into heteronormative time and "according to other logics of location, movement, and identification...as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative lifestyles, and eccentric life practices..." (1). As straight time is stable, conventional, and comforting, queer time emerges as a *strange, imaginative, and eccentric* structure. Nevertheless, through location and identity, queerness becomes isolated within the hegemonic heteronormative foundation of time, causing queer subjects to harness an ephemeral existence. As straight time grants one emergence of the adult, queer time allows for multiple moments of self emergence which appear in a cyclical pattern. Moments of queer time lack stability and cease to exist consistently; they appear only to

disappear. This causes queer subjects to constantly evolve through each encounter with time, space, and other queer subjects. This pattern is known as the queer ephemeral.

The queer ephemeral emerges out of the paradoxes of queer time. There is stability in queer time's fragmented inconsistency; the fleeting essence of queer time brings along frustration and grief but also ecstasy and fullness. The cycle of the queer ephemeral consists of the emergence and reemergence of the queer subject. Thus, queerness is constantly constructed and deconstructed, leaving the queer subject in a state of longing. Elizabeth Freeman writes that "longing produces modes of both belonging and "being long," or persisting over time. Yet this is more than desire, for desire is a form of belief in the referential object that the subject feels s/he lacks and that would make him or her more whole..." (14). The desire for queer collectivity emerges out of the queer ephemeral; fullness is achieved through a collective body of queerness. As the wholeness of heteronormative time is achieved through a full and strong collective entity of societal morals and ways of life, queer time's lack of an established and strong collective body causes the *presentness* of queer time to always be ephemeral; queer subjects live in a state of unknowable potential, futurity, and fragmentation. On the presentness of queerness, José Esteban Muñoz writes,

The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of a majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and "rational" expectations...Let me be clear that the idea is not simply to turn away from the present...The present must be known in relation to alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds. (27)

In conversation with Freeman's definition of longing, Muñoz alludes to queer affinity towards alternative temporal and spatial maps as the present becomes a toxic force. As the present is an

ephemeral temporal plane itself, the past and future emerge as *affective* worlds to the queer subject. Stephen Barber and David Clark define queerness as “...a moment,’ it is also then a force; or rather it is a crossing of temporality within force” (qtd. In Halberstam 8). Nevertheless, queerness is momentary within the fabric of heteronormative time. In queer time, subjects participate in an active desiring for past and future moments of queerness. Thus, queer nostalgia and futurity emerge as driving forces that push the queer subject through time and consequently, the queer ephemeral. Queerness emerges as a transcending force that is always becoming<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to map critical examples of the queer ephemeral through music, literature, and film by categorizing and defining the fleeting structure through the terms of emergence, ecstasy, grief, and utopia. In *Emergence*, I pay close attention to Venezuelan performance artist Arca as a manifestation of the queer ephemeral. By looking specifically at two of Arca’s songs and corresponding music videos, I attempt to paint the rapid pace of emergence and reemergence of the self that occurs again and again throughout each of my chapters. I introduce Rosemary Jackson’s definitions of the *fantastic* in relation to Arca’s visuals. The relationship between fantasy and queer time presents itself in each of my chapters. In *Ecstasy*, I analyze Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography* in relation to the paradoxes that exist within queer engagements of queer nostalgia, a critical player in the pattern of ephemeral emergence. I engage with both queer theory and affect theory to show how past moments of queer euphoria completely reconfigure and alter one’s queerness. In *Grief*, I discuss grief in relation to Susan Stryker’s definition of transgender rage and the 2017 Chilean film, *Una mujer fantástica* (A Fantastic Woman). Grief emerges as a crucial generative aspect within the queer ephemeral. Finally, in *Utopia*, I pay close attention to the late electronic music artist SOPHIE and her album, *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides*, which emphasizes the immateriality of



queerness and the utopias that are constantly constructed and deconstructed. By the end of *Mapping the Queer Ephemeral*, the queer ephemeral's havoc ceases to exist due to reclamation of its fragmented framework by each of these manifestations.

# Emergence

**Flashing Lights:**

**Arca as the Queer Ephemeral**

“I know you want it / Time / To let it out / It’s Time.”

Arca

52°28'45.6"N 13°26'01.1"E

In an effort to further define the queer ephemeral, I engage with the Venezuelan performance artist Arca as a manifestation of the fleeting qualities of queerness through their cyclical pattern of emergence and reemergence of the self. Arca, whose full name is Alejandra Ghersis, identifies as a non-binary trans woman and uses the pronouns she/her. She has gone from a commercial producer to an underground avant-garde artist over the course of her career; Arca has worked with artists as commercial as Kanye West to unconventional musicians such as Björk and FKA Twigs. Arca's intentional or unintentional shift from the mainstream to the underground scenes distanced her sonic production greatly from the critiques of high culture. I do not suggest that artistic material aside from the mainstream is low culture, but rather, exists in a space separate from the critiques of the majority and pressures from the greater musical industrial complex.

Arca is consequently aware of her ephemeral artistic identity. In a revealing interview with performance and conceptual artist Marina Abramović, Arca described the nature of her happiness and creative momentum, stating, "I'm chasing it...I think of happiness as a state rather than a destination, and I find myself slipping in and out of it. Sometimes I'm frustrated when I slip out of it, but I guess its impermanence is part of what keeps me wanting to slip back in, to create the conditions so that the sensation may emerge inside rather than force" (Abramović 2020). She talks of *slipping* in and out of moments of happiness suggesting that there are extraneous circumstances that often configure the self. Nevertheless, Arca is chasing these moments and conditions of a certain queerness; she desires conditions that will forever be fleeting and impermanent. Through her work, we see how Arca's active desiring of a stable and permanent queerness projects her into new realms of *being*. Her existence within the queer ephemeral emerges as ever-changing. In engaging with Arca as a crucial example of the queer

ephemeral, I pay close attention to her songs “Desafío” and “Time” as well as their respective music videos. Over the course of these works, it is important to note that “Desafío” is representative of Arca before her transition. As “Desafío” shows Arca’s submission to and frustration with the uncontrollable nature of the queer ephemeral, “Time” is evidence of Arca’s attempt to reclaim her fleeting existence.

### **Flashing Moments of Collective Queerness in “Desafío”**

Arca’s shift from a mainstream producer to a visibly queer, enigmatic pop resonance is found in her self-titled project released in 2017. “Desafío” served as a public introduction to Arca’s vocalized musical career. Prior to *Arca*, applied vocals akin to a pop star were unheard of within her experimental techno tracks. Arca’s use of vocals in “Desafío” is a physical and direct display of creative agency and narrative that she had not fully realized in the past. The track begins with Arca guiding her listener with distant sirens and synths; they blare and screech in a constructed void typical of her production. Arca builds the sonic layers of her production one on top of another, and when aspects are hyper-applied or deleted, the track propels the listener to pay attention to the sonics that are stable and consistent throughout; those sonics are Arca’s vocals. Arca sings, “Tócame de primera vez / Mátame una y otra vez / Ámame y átame y dególlame / Búscame y péntrate y devórame,” translating to *Touch me for the first time / Kill me again and again / Love me and tie me and slaughter me / Find me and penetrate me and devour me*. Arca’s words are erotic and dark as beginnings turn to repeated violent and lustful occurrences. She asks her listener to *find* them, implying a current state of being lost or rather helpless, however, Arca associates safety and in turn, love, with unconventional displays of fetish. She ultimately surrenders herself to the mystified subject, or rather subjects of the song, as she sings “Listo o no / Hay un abismo dentro de mí,” translating to *Ready or Not / There is an*

*abyss within me*. There are sexual lines of affinity between Arca's description of penetration, devourment, and internal abyss suggesting both figurative and physical abysses within Arca's entity. What is this *abyss* however and why does Arca submit her agency willingly to this brief encounter? The brevity of Arca's lyrics is felt within the first lines stated before, *Touch me for the first time*. While monotonous overtones are emphasized in Arca's encounters, there is distinct distance created between Arca and her subjects; these *first times* occur consistently and rapidly. Thus, there is stability in the unstable. Her abyss is essentially numb to the changing circumstances and results in pure submission to the momentous entities of queer love and fetish. Nevertheless, Arca submits to the paradoxes of the queer ephemeral as these brief moments bring her enough pleasure that she is able to endure the pain of their ephemerality. The dichotomy between the figurative and physical imagery Arca illustrates situates the fleeting concept of time in a purgatoric void that is relished in.

The translation of "Desafío" can be translated as a noun or first-person verb which allows Arca's fetishization of momentous sexual encounters to hold personal agency in different respective spaces. If we are to read "Desafío" as translating to the noun *challenge* or *deviance*, the track is a call to arms against the forces that lend themselves to momentous happenings, associating notions of a collective suffering. However, when reading the translation as *I challenge*, there is independent rebellion motioned within Arca, stressing a sense of feeling outnumbered and defeated; Arca then accepts this defeat forthrightly and willingly. The difference of translations of "Desafío" allows Arca's frustration with the queer ephemeral to emerge as well as her desire to combat its cyclical pattern. However, she ultimately abandons this frustration and falls into the queer ephemeral by submitting her body to the fragmented construction of queer time. If we are to look back to Freeman's analysis of the erotics of queer

longing, Arca's longing is indeterminate. We are unsure if she feels something lacking internally as she feels wholeness although being utterly and momentarily fulfilled. As Muñoz defined the present as "not enough" for queer subjects, Arca becomes more present in her departure from markers of stability and permanence by indulging in the temporal timeline they are subject to. By distancing themselves from a traditional heteronormative life consisting of marriage and child-bearing, or *normative tastes* as Muñoz notes, Arca's is able to emerge and reemerge through her engagement with alternative temporal and spacial maps. Thus, queer longevity lies in a fluid cyclical nature of emergence of the *personal* and *transpersonal*. I define the *personal* as the constant and stable purity of queer idealizations of the future. The *transpersonal* refers to the permeable limits that exist between the self and intruding elements, whether it be heteronormative constructions of time, gender orders, or past trauma.

In further cultivating the tension between the personal, transpersonal, and endless cycle of the emergence of these bodies, Arca visually articulates the stated ephemeral map within her music video for "Desafío." The momentary force of queer temporality is visually apparent within the first frames of Arca's visual; flashing strobe lights fall onto Arca's confined body within a strait jacket. In relation to Barber and Clark's linking of queerness to the temporal as "a moment," Arca's very form and presence relies on these flashing lights that are momentary and fleeting. With a leather straitjacket bound with belts and harnesses, Arca associates suffocation and isolation with BDSM iconography, therefore addressing elements of pain and pleasure in the material form. Pain is thus articulated through movement as they are physically dragged across the dirt ground by an unknown figure. The camera focuses on Arca's stretched arms and dangling head; it is through these moments of *dragging* from one location to another that the strobe lights pause. Arca then stands to flashing lights, surrounded by several men, stumbling in

their arms for a brief moment of intimacy, only to fall again. The flashing lights halt yet again as Arca's face comes into clearer frames, scraped and cut. It is noteworthy to address Arca's consistent eye contact with the camera; Arca's consistent eye contact with the camera is inherently more intimate with the viewer than the men that grasp ahold of her. All of this occurs in a forest only lit by bright spotlights; it feels almost heavenly as Arca collapses for a final time. The four figures, or rather 'spirits' (as defined in the credits), then hold Arca's lifeless body. The *personal* manifests in Arca's movement. Although unable to attain complete agency of this movement as she is being physically dragged by other entities, it is through these moments the flashing lights are absent. Arca is left with the viewer in a stable yet mobile space; her form is not emphasized or deleted as a result of the strobe lights. When Arca moves between bodies, the strobe lights return as she is passed from one spirit to the next. The *transpersonal* then lies in the momentous flashes of fleeting encounters that take a direct toll on Arca's existence. The transpersonal manipulates the personal into being twisted, pulled, and pushed to unknown realizations that are sometimes euphoric and sometimes draining. The transpersonal ultimately allows different forms of the personal to emerge and then emerge again; the cyclical repetition in Arca's video emphasizes the brief and everlasting effects of the queer ephemeral.

### **Arca and Time as a Queer Collective**

Arca's gender transition occurred during the development of her 2020 studio album which confronted themes of artificial intelligence, queer love, non-binary & trans identity, and the construct of time. There is joy felt within the tracks of *KiCk i* as it is a physical manifestation of Arca's transition to a certain queerness that felt distant and fragmented in the past. The track "Time" displays Arca's desire to exist with time's ephemerality in harmony; she longs for ownership over her present. Instead of Arca addressing time as a temporal heteronormative

convention, she attempts to reclaim queer time as a transformative mystification of the present that is seemingly endless. The construction of the track initially begins with two synths alternating like the ticking of a clock, Arca's vocals trembling across the soundscape. They sing, in English, "And it's time / to let it out / and show the world / Take this time / It's all yours." Time is reclaimed as an *owned* entity; it is *now*, not the past or the future. Arca's lyrics take the perspective of her queerness; her reconfigured identity grants her access to time. There is urgency and relief felt in Arca's soothing lyrics as what was once hidden can now be shown to the world. This urgency is born out of a sense of lost time that has passed over her body; Arca takes back the absences and traumas of her past to emphasize newfound potential. Similar to "Desafio," Arca's vocals echo in a sonic void, however, they are more celebratory as she is almost addressing a past self. The dread of fleeting time has paused, and the industrial production of the track emphasizes the emergence of something new, something in the making, and something eccentric.

Through Arca's visual for "Time," she presents the construct of time as a potential suitor in the shape of a monster; Arca constructs an imaginative void where herself and time can exist in harmony. Later in the visual, Arca allows her collective with time to exist apart from the imaginative, projecting herself and the monster into contemporary society. Similar to the flashing momentary lights that transcend Arca's silhouette in "Desafio," "Time" begins with lights caressing her form atop an electric bull. The strobe effect is minimized, alluding to newfound control and agency Arca feels within the passing temporal events of queer life. Seduction and desire emerge from Arca's direct contact with the viewer, smizing with eccentric flare and attitude.



There are two spaces Arca constructs within the private imaginative sector of her visual. One consists of Arca riding an electric bull, surrounded by darkness despite her laser lit harness and head piece. The other displays Arca in a sepia-lit circular ring, covered in dirt; Arca stands on the left of the frame seducing the monster of time. She appears to be seducing the monster as they step on a fallen skeleton. This skeleton, the final form of human existence, could be a victim of the beast-at-large, however, Arca's stature on its bones can be metaphorically representative of the death of a past self and the reemergence and reconfiguration of that self. The combination of the electric bull and the ring are directly referencing the *corrida de toros* Venezuelan tradition of bullfighting; Arca remains in control in one frame, and subject to a "beast" in another. The existence of Arca's monster must also be stressed as a form of localized queerness; its gender is unknown (we assume it has gender due to its material connection to capitalism through dress). In some aspects, the monster is more connected with contemporary humanity than Arca is. As the chorus ensues, Arca's lasers seduce the monster in an orgasmic and phallic way; the monster consumes the laser light, licking it and teasing it as if it were a sexual organ. Nevertheless, Arca is likened to an alien; her queerness seduces the monster of time. The figures are then placed into the public realm of society, emerging onto a bustling New York city street, falling onto one another and caressing each other unapologetically. They ride in a limousine, a sign of wealth and luxury, only to end up in a small karaoke disco bar; the flashing lights now vary in color and shapes. Simultaneously, the frames of the video begin flashing more rapidly as the beast whips Arca under an awning with the text "Liberty" lit above them.

Ultimately, Arca's "Time" disrupts the queer ephemeral cycle briefly by reversing its effects. In a blatant display of control and agency of their movement, Arca moves queerness with its contemporary alienation from the private into the public, with little to no difference of

execution. Time and space become entities that have minimal power over Arca as she seduces the monster of time to be subject to her. Arca's assertion over time transfers to the public realm as the monster and herself are able to exist in harmony; the two treat the disco bar as a similar space to the dark void present earlier in the visual. Arca separates *liberty* from the Western idea and displays the term in a more literal form; the Oxford English Dictionary definition of liberty is "freedom from the bondage or dominating influence of worldly ties" (OED 2021). Arca's queerness is nevertheless separated from anything fixed and the imagery of bondage is reclaimed through fetish (the monster's whipping, Arca's harness). However, this reclamation of time by the queer subject harnesses an element of the fantastic; Arca's void is located on an otherworldly plane of existence.

In Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, she describes the fabric of the *fantastic*, writing that it "points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside of dominant value systems" (4). She further elaborates that "...expression as manifestation to expression as expulsion, is one of the recurrent features of fantastic narrative, as it tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence. (4) In Arca's visual for "Time," she displays her desire to control the fleeting nature of time on her own terms. As Arca's queerness is subject to the rigid *real* society that is entrenched in heteronormativity, she subverts straight time and stabilizes queer time. Consequently, her subversion of straight time is only able to exist in the fantastic, away from dominant value systems. Arca claims her time as her own by removing hegemonic markers that cease to let her escape her ephemeral existence. Jackson continues, stating, "Definitions of what can 'be', and images of what cannot be, obviously undergo considerable

historical shifts...Presentations of otherness are imagined and interpreted differently...otherness is transcendent, marvellously different from the human..." (23). Arca's otherness is able to escape straight time through fantastic depiction; she is representative of an alien as time takes the form of a monster. Time ultimately undergoes a shift from a rigid structure, to an entity that can be physically seduced, touched, and felt. Arca's sexualization of time through monstrous and fantastic imagery allows her to join an imagined collective with the queer ephemeral. However, the fantastic ceases to exist in the real world. Arca is never actually able to join in a collective with time; she will always be subject to straight time. Thus, her queerness will always be ephemeral.

Arca's "Time" represents an idealized queer engagement with time where fleeting moments cease to exist. Arca is able to escape the queer ephemeral felt in "Desafio" by imagining a space where her queerness can emerge fully. Through Arca's frustration with queer time, the queer ephemeral emerges as a force that pushes and pulls its subjects through the all temporal planes, whether that be the past, present, or future. In Arca's case, we are able to see how her incapability of existing in the present pushes her to imagine a void where her queerness is able to flourish. Through her reclamation of the queer ephemeral, by embracing its fragmented construction, Arca is able to propel her queerness to unknown territory. The queer ephemeral causes queer individuals to constantly emerge and reemerge as a result of desiring a queerness that will forever be fleeting to them. While Arca's "Desafio" and "Time" serve as hyper-manifestations of engagement with the queer ephemeral, the following chapters in this thesis will display the intricacies of this unpredictable void of *constantly becoming*.

# Ecstasy

**Ecstatic Time &  
Masochistic Nostalgia  
in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando***

“...it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history - personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice - in an idiom of pleasure.”

Elizabeth Freeman

48°52'52.3"N 2°23'05.3"E

On time and pleasure, queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz writes, “Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one’s past, present, or future” (Muñoz 32). Ecstasy, in turn, transcends time, according to Muñoz, allowing one to locate the emotion in all temporal planes of the human experience. By delineating ecstatic time as its own separate entity, Muñoz implies that ecstatic time is not continuous and instead, fragmented. In other words, time is not all ecstatic, and living entities do not experience ecstatic time as a collective. If ecstasy and its abundance are indeterminable, one does not know how much ecstatic time is to come or already has run out; there is no way one can generate it themselves. Nevertheless, one will always crave moments of euphoria, looking to the past for comparisons; these comparisons or rather, nostalgias, are both beneficial and detrimental to the human psyche. The queer ephemeral, as defined before, harnesses both generalized and localized paradoxes within its fabric. As nostalgias cause one to look back, they also project the subject forward in search of more moments of ecstasy; the capacity to experience ecstatic time is endless. Time and control, as mentioned earlier, are incompatible for the queer subject. As queerness is incapable of escaping the framework of heteronormative time, moments of queer ecstasy are seemingly stripped away rather than naturally egressing in each of the depictions surveyed in this thesis. Queer ecstasy comes to form in flashes of queer collectivity that vanish quickly and suddenly; moments of queer collectivity cease to be stable and consistent within heteronormative time.

Even though a collective body of queerness, or queer utopia is forever fleeting, the search for one never ends because of the queer subject’s desire for ecstatic time. Queer bodies pull and push each other as there is eventual movement in one direction or another in any moment of

stillness or suspension. In other words, there is no sense of self-permanence because there is always already both the anticipation of the next and the loss of the former. Nostalgia for ecstatic time emerges as a dominating force in the spectrum of queer lives, both consciously and unconsciously, guiding the subject through experiences and encounters. Nonetheless, ecstatic nostalgia is the only point of reference for queer utopia making because it crystallizes personal ideals for the queer subject to look back on; the past harnesses temporal agency over the queer subject. If the queer subject is always chasing queerness, specifically queer collectivity, then the moments that they encounter this queerness emerge as foundational markers of desire. Queer individuals evoke nostalgia paradoxically in productive and masochistic senses of pain and pleasure; they inevitably give themselves up to the uncontrollable gravity of the queer ephemeral cycle. As the queer body moves through time, time moves over the queer body.

In prefacing my engagement with Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*, it is crucial to draw attention to and define queer masochistic engagements of nostalgia. Elizabeth Freeman notes the parallels between temporal trauma and the world of sexual sadomasochism, writing,

Sadomasochism has certainly been read as the cumulative effect of traumatic relations between parents and children, as a rehearsal of horrifying misuses of power at particular historical moments, and/or as a commentary on the asymmetrical organization of power in everyday life. But however one views S/M, it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history - personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice - in an idiom of pleasure. (137)

Sadomasochistic ritual has to do with power over the past. As Freeman describes, the past is dealt with through pain and pleasure. There is pain with looking back on traumatic relations, but

there is pleasure with reclaiming them. In terms of the queer ephemeral, moments of queer ecstasy and their relations with heteronormative time display an asymmetrical organization of power; queer moments of ecstasy are forced to exist within and are subject to heteronormative time. Thus, when queer subjects look back on moments of ecstatic time, they actively engage with the pleasure held within the memory itself and the pain held within the memory's brevity; heteronormative society with its rapid and oppressive linear trend opposes moments of queer ecstasy and collectivity. Nevertheless, queer subjects call upon nostalgia sadomasochistically. However, as they consciously call upon the pleasure of past moments of ecstatic time, they are unconsciously met with the pain of queer ecstasy's ephemerality.

In conjunction with Muñoz's definition of ecstatic time as a "scream or grunt of pleasure," there is an implied paradox present in the evocation of nostalgia. In trans theorist Susan Stryker's essay "Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism," she states, "Something serene and paradoxically solitary can be found in the experience of giving oneself over to the inhibition and enactment of a shared pattern of motion - a contemplative solitude borne of one's ecstatic displacement into a space where the body actively receives and transmits the movement of others..." (qtd. In Crawford 170). From this, collectivity is possible in a shared pattern of motion of queer bodies. In relation to time, we see queer subjects *giving* themselves *over* to the painful and pleasurable act of looking back in order to look forward - masochistic nostalgia. Along the theoretical thread of Freeman, there is collective queer suffering of the ephemerality of ecstatic time. As we will see, this suffering serves to propel the queer subject forward through time in search for more consistent and stable planes of queer ecstasy.

In her 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*, Virginia Woolf creates the gender-changing and immortal protagonist as a manifestation of the queer ephemeral state. As Orlando lives over

the course of four-hundred years, Woolf portrays her subject as in constant search for ecstasy, retreating in moments of melancholia and masochistic nostalgia, only to emerge again and again in an effort to find their queer utopia. As four-hundred years is not a realistic lifespan, Orlando is rooted in Rosemary Jackson's definitions of the *fantastic*. Orlando's queerness is able to be both realized and unrealized through their fantastic immortality that allows endless queer emergence to occur. The queer utopia that Orlando searches for is never revealed to the reader and by the end of the novel, we are not sure if Orlando ever reaches it; we cannot help but see Orlando nostalgically looking back at the day, or rather years, before their current present. Crawford writes,

... we can understand the gender-changing in *Orlando: A Biography* as *one* extension of a less obvious affective condition: the empathy required to *move* the human subject away from itself – to project or feel it “into” something else that does not yet exist.

Accomplishing such projections necessarily entails a queer relationship to futurity and to the past, given that one must be able to feel that one “is” something that does not yet have a referent. (170)

Throughout the novel, as Crawford alludes to, there is a sense of Orlando actively *becoming* through the various encounters they experience with love interests, royalty, diplomats, and artists as well as their uncontrollable movement through space and time. The subjects that Orlando becomes drawn to, enter and exit out of chance as time becomes incomprehensible to themselves and the ambivalent narrator. As Orlando's adventures are fleeting for themselves and the biographer, their desire for permanence and truth become the dominant bodies that thrust the novel forward. In the following chapter, I focus on Orlando's search for truth and permanence in relation to their masochistic engagement with nostalgia for past moments of ecstasy and



euphoria. As Orlando transcends gender binaries through their supernatural transformation, I observe their drastic physical change in relation to their association of truth with ecstatic time. Throughout this chapter, I use the pronouns they/them for Orlando, as they switch genders multiple times throughout the text; they come to represent a collective within themselves. Orlando, similar to Arca, represents the queer ephemeral state as one that is inescapable, paradoxical, and sadomasochistic in nature, exposing pain and pleasure as necessary sensations for queer utopia-making. Even though Orlando's immortality omits the structure of time as a force that must be conquered, Woolf unconsciously depicts the fleeting queer ephemeral plane through Orlando as a permeable subject, altered and everchanging through each personal encounter.

Woolf's own frustration with the queer ephemeral cycle in her fleeting relationship with writer Vita Sackville-West frames *Orlando: A Biography* as an attempt to chase and capture a certain stability and truth. Sackville-West's androgynous demeanor, glorious social life, and international eye appeared to Woolf in such contrast to her own qualities. Julia Briggs writes of Woolf's fascination with Sackville-West writing, "Vita had changed Virginia's awareness of her own desires, encouraging her to think differently about gender, its nature and meaning, and in particular, its fluidity...She had first seen Vita as a 'grenadier; hard; handsome, manly...'" (189). Woolf's fascination and obsession with wanting Sackville-West became all-consuming; Sackville-West was a mere enigma to Woolf, inaccessible and out of touch. Briggs draws attention to a series of letters in the summer and autumn of 1926, noting,

Virginia sought opportunities to be alone with Vita, and Vita responded eagerly, on one occasion enclosing a love-letter inside a letter... Each protested her need of the other: 'I

do want to see you, I do - I do'. 'Now never say again that I don't love you. I want to dreadfully see you. That is all there is to it.' Vita's letters, as she set out on her second visit to Teheran in January 1927, were full of yearning: 'It's time I either lived with Virginia or went back to Asia, and as I can't do the former I must do the latter'; 'I don't know how I shall get on without you - in fact I don't feel I can - you have become so essential to me. (189-190)

Shortly after these letters were penned, Sackville-West travelled through Moscow for the remainder of the winter, leaving Woolf to long for contact, closure, and stability (Briggs 190). Sackville-West's fleeting essence fully manifested in the release of her 1923 novel *Challenge*, which detailed her love affair with socialite Violet Trefusis. Loretta Stec writes of Vita and Violet's relationship in regards to time, calling on Halberstam's definition of temporality, writing, "The time Vita spent with Violet could easily be categorized as 'queer time': their time in Paris was an escape from the normative constructs of what Halberstam calls 'reproductive temporality' - that which is associated with marriage, children, stability and respectability..." (184). Woolf's sense of betrayal and isolation in modernist society manifested itself in the writing of *Orlando*, as "a revenge for infidelities," as Briggs puts it (192). By framing *Orlando* as a biography, Woolf harnesses agency in capturing Sackville-West and her fleeting qualities. Through satire, melodrama, and the fantastic, Woolf situates the fictional *Orlando: A Biography* as an artifact of contemporary queer longing, frustration, and ephemerality, writing Orlando, or rather Sackville-West, as never reaching or locating their desired existence.

### **Atmospheric Ecstasy & Collectivity: Orlando & Sasha**

Biographies map, catalog, trace, and situate the events of one life into a collective body of work, tangible evidence of that legacy and its everlasting permanence. Woolf traces the

trajectory of Orlando's life through their movement and atmosphere. As we will see through the convergence of affect theory and temporality, Orlando holds little to no control over their movement through time and space; their existence becomes fleeting to the reader, narrator, and themselves. This ultimately places emphasis on Orlando's masochistic relationship with nostalgia for ecstatic time in the endless cycle of the queer ephemeral. Sara Ahmed and Ben Anderson provide nuanced definitions of space, orientation, and centers that allow Orlando's permeable landscape to come to light. In her *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed defines space in terms of orientation around perceived centers, using the West's relationship with the East as a foundation, writing, "To be orientated around something is not so much to take up that thing, as to be taken up by something, such that one might even become what it is that is 'around'" (119). Thus, the concept of a center is fluid and artificial. Centers change, their momentary capacities revolving around desire. Ahmed elaborates, "Such an inheritance can be rethought in terms of orientations: *we inherit the reachability of some objects*, as those that are "given" to us or at least are made available to us within the family home... By objects, we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, even worlds" (126). These objects, whether they be societal conventions, material objects, or personal relationships, pull and push their subject.

Ben Anderson further captures atmospheric perception as internal and external, explaining, "Atmosphere is: impersonal or transpersonal intensity; environment, or the transmission of the other's feeling; qualified aura; tone in literature; mimetic waves of sentiment; or more broadly a sense of place" (78). Atmosphere deals with internalized auras and their interactions with the external world; an atmosphere is a kind of binary that deals with the infusion of both the internal and external spheres. Similar to Arca, the *personal* and

*transpersonal* are co-dependent in *Orlando*. Again, I define the *personal* as the constant and stable purity of queer idealizations of the future. The *transpersonal* refers to the permeable limits that exist between the self and intruding elements, whether it be heteronormative constructions of time, gender orders, or past trauma. In Orlando's case, the *transpersonal* lives in their nostalgia for ecstatic time, directly influencing their *personal* search for stability and ideal atmosphere, or rather, utopia.

Initially, Orlando does not desire a companion, or queer collective, as they harness a deep love for solitude. Orlando's longing to be alone stems from a false sense of completeness they feel as a result of their elite status in society. Orlando perceives themselves as having everything one could ever want and as people desire Orlando more and more, they turn the other cheek. Orlando's high status isolates themselves from the majority of society; they have achieved capitalistic success before their story has even started. From an aristocratic family, Orlando resides in an estate that extends his lineage by generations. Halberstam writes of the concept of inheritance, "The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to the future of both familial and national stability" (Halberstam 5). Orlando's "familial and national stability" is established at the beginning of the novel; Orlando owns a massive estate filled with decadent furniture, books, and a full staff. Orlando is ultimately removed from the linear trajectory of heteronormative time as they have already achieved the goals of legacy and stability through wealth and ownership. Nevertheless, Orlando as a champion of heteronormative time allows their queerness to emerge out of encounters with other individuals and spaces, dismantling their perceived stability through capitalistic success. Orlando's solitude is disrupted by their ability to

draw others along with them. Orlando is desired before they begin to desire another. The biographer describes,

He was careful to avoid meeting anyone. There was Stubbs, the gardener, coming along the path. He hid behind a tree till he had passed...There is perhaps a kinship among qualities; one draws another along with it; and the biographer should here call attention to the fact that this clumsiness is often mated with a love of solitude. Having stumbled over a chest, Orlando naturally loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone. (17-18)

The biographer paints Orlando as a figure who is *careful* and who *hides* to avoid others in order to enjoy *vast views*. However, Orlando's solitude is interrupted by their ability to attract others, they *draw* people and objects toward themselves. Here, Orlando's solitude is fleeting not only in their own incapability of preserving it, but by the biographer also interrupting its description. Nevertheless, Orlando encounters others by chance as the transpersonal people, places, and things, attract Orlando, and in turn, are attracted to them. Through Orlando's desire and chance encounters, their satisfaction with their elite status dwindles away as their queerness emerges.

Orlando's initial infatuation with the Russian Princess Sasha serves as a defining moment of ecstatic time, completely altering their sense of self and projecting them into the masochistic cycle of queer-longing. In establishing Orlando's nostalgia for ecstatic time, it is crucial to map how empowered, entranced, and enveloped Orlando becomes in their momentary encounter with Sasha, and how losing her paradoxically stains and embellishes their life. Sasha's presence is violently disruptive, disorienting Orlando's beloved sense of solitude and replacing it with the need to have a companion; to Orlando, legacy and permanence become synonymous with partnership and collectiveness rather than material possessions or capitalistic success. Orlando's

idea of selfhood, once strong and impermeable to outsiders, becomes indefinable and unpredictable. Due to their brief encounter with Sasha, grief for the past becomes all consuming for Orlando, as they do not know how to exist outside the queer utopia that was once available to them through collectivity. Sasha's queerness, defined by her mystifying androgyny and foreignness, removes Orlando from the dominant culture of complicity and heteronormativity.

The biographer describes Orlando's chance introduction to Sasha:

...The person, whatever the name or sex, was about middle height, very slenderly fashioned, and dressed entirely in oyster-coloured velvet, trimmed with some unfamiliar greenish-coloured fur. But these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person. Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together...Orlando stared; trembled; turned hot; turned cold; longed to hurl himself through the summer air; to crush acorns beneath his feet; to toss his arms with the beech trees and the oaks... (37-38)

Orlando is stimulated by the confusion and ellusivity of Sasha's aura, undergoing a physical state of *trembling* paralysis, turning *hot* and *cold*; Sasha's intrigue and mystery strengthens Orlando's desire for her. Their mind associates Sasha with the seductiveness of a *melon*, *pineapple*, and *emerald*, all resonating in non-gender specific sectors; Sasha is an object of desire as her name and sex are arbitrary to Orlando. The ambiguity and lack of continuity of these images place Sasha as *other*, causing Orlando to be *drawn* to her very being. Ahmed elaborates on the connection between desire and movement, stating, "The body moves, and moves towards objects, in order to perform such actions. Such a performance is an orientation toward the future,

insofar as the action is also the expression of a wish or intention” (109). Orlando *wishes* for Sasha in the sense that they believe her presence aligns itself with theirs; her atmosphere transcends Orlando’s internally and subsequently extends them both into the realm of the *other*. Orlando and Sasha’s affair influences Orlando’s personal idealizations of the future as they come to long for the euphoric nature of their bond.

In their encounter with Sasha, Orlando emerges only to figuratively perish, stressing the impermanent and unpredictable nature of queerness in any temporal sense. Orlando becomes incapable of identifying their newfound queer selfhood without Sasha; their newfound selfhood disappears with Sasha. Crawford elaborates on Woolf’s construct of time in *Orlando*, stating, “Clock-time, Woolf shows, is not body-time. It is rather, a potentially violent way to stay the becoming capacities of time - to deny that is, the propensity of one’s life, body, and desires to unfold in unpredictable ways” (172). Orlando’s embodiment of Sasha’s existence as both a partner and extension of themselves, propels them to forever unfold in an effort to *stay* becoming; Orlando desires to be like Sasha. Eve Sedgwick describes the act of being *beside* an object, whether that be a physical or non-physical entity, writing, “*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8). Being *beside* provokes some sort of attraction on behalf of those that are encountering each other. Rather than a static and passive state, being *beside* is an active engagement of personal atmospheres. Orlando exhibits just that - actively aligning themselves with Sasha by *desiring* and *mimicking* her, whilst *withdrawing* away from the hegemonic court they belong to:

He was seldom far from her side, and their conversation, though unintelligible to the rest,

was carried on with such animation, provoked such blushes and laughter, that the dullest could guess the subject. Moreover, the change in Orlando himself was extraordinary.

Nobody had ever seen him so animated... (41-42)

The narrator continues,

Making some excuse or other, he would leave the company as soon as they had dined, or steal away from the skaters, who were forming sets for a quarille. Next moment it would be seen that the Muscovite was missing too. But what most outraged the Court, and stung it in its tenderest part, which is its vanity, was that the couple was often seen to slip under the silken rope, which railed off the royal enclosure from the public part of the river and to disappear among the crowd of common people. (43)

Orlando and Sasha, as a collective, are established as *other*, not only by the royal court but also by commoners. As they begin to blur the line between commoners and courtiers, their absence is noticed as much as their presence; their ability to *slip under the silken rope* is scrutinized as Orlando and Sasha exist in limbo between social spheres and genders. This motion of “slipping” is only emphasized in the imagery of the frozen river serving as the center of British society; citizens and officials skate from place to place, bumping, exchanging, and slipping into the auras of others. Orlando and Sasha’s unconventional demeanors come to fit in nowhere outside the collective atmosphere they have created together. The fusion between Orlando and Sasha as *other* allows them to escape a sense of isolation evoked by the royal court. By residing in the public realm, their collective is able to be a part of a broader collective: the rest of British society. Orlando and Sasha lose the spotlight that is shown on them by the royal court and become lost in the crowds of commoners.



This is not to say that Orlando and Sasha's *slippage* obliterates feelings of societal and heteronormative isolation. Ahmed explains, "The politics of mobility, of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces, can be redescribed as the politics of who gets to be at home and who gets to extend their bodies into inhabitable spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable as they extend the surfaces of such bodies" (142). Sasha pulls Orlando into an inhabitable space of queerness; Orlando was unknowing to the existence of this inhabitable space prior. Orlando and Sasha's collective harnesses an element of co-dependency as Orlando is unable to exist as their newly emerged self without her presence. Sasha enables Orlando to become eccentric and impulsive, allowing them to uncover new passions outside of economic and social success. Thus, Sasha is foundational and formative for Orlando's emergence as *something* new, her presence contrasting greatly with Orlando's past suitors - Clorinda, Favilla, and Euphrosyne - who were easily acquired and easily dismissed. As any of them would have served as "a perfect wife for such a nobleman as Orlando," Clorinda, Favilla, and Euphrosyne serve as heteronormative objects of necessity, simply checking a box off in the grand scheme of straight time (33). Sasha, instead, functions as an object that pulls Orlando away from conventions of the Royal Court by blurring the dividing lines of gender and class through atmospheric extension; Orlando is enveloped by Sasha, her absence isolating Orlando from the royal court they are subsequently removed from. Crawford writes of subjectivity and empathy, describing,

Three important shifts occur for the subject experiencing empathy. First, the presumed division between subject and object disappears, which means that one's self-ownership has been "felt" across. Secondly, one becomes able to project oneself somewhere one is not, which means that one's environment (immediate or distant) becomes paramount to

one's affective life...Third, one is able to imagine oneself as something other, the very affective grounds necessary for transformation (gender or otherwise) (169)

Crawford's outline of empathy is exhibited between Orlando and Sasha; Orlando's empathy for Sasha allows them to emerge and transform with newfound queer selfhood. Orlando's sense of self ownership is *felt across* Sasha as they are physically projected into public life apart from the royal court, and figuratively into the space of queer time, uncertain and unstable. Nevertheless, Orlando sees a new life for themselves when Sasha is present. When she disappears, Orlando is forced to constantly *imagine themselves as something other*, searching for moments of ecstasy by masochistically engaging with nostalgia.

Sasha allows Orlando to envision a life outside of capitalistic, heteronormative constructions and when she abruptly vanishes out of thin air, Orlando's newly emerged self disassociates into episodes of melancholy and nostalgia. Her disappearance results in a drastic shift in Orlando's figurative and physical atmospheres, this movement preventing them from achieving gratification and consistent ecstasy. Anderson writes, "Atmospheres have, then, a characteristic spatial form - diffusion within a sphere...atmospheres are generated by bodies - of multiple types - affecting one another as some form of 'envelopment' is produced" (79). We are ultimately forced to view Orlando and Sasha as their own 'ecosystem' as the removal of Sasha inherently results in a violent altering of that system. The spatial form that Orlando and Sasha construct, collapses to the point of apocalyptic destruction:

When the twelfth struck he knew that his doom was sealed. It was useless for the rational part of him to reason; she might be late, she might be prevented; she might have missed her way. The passionate and feeling heart of Orlando knew the truth. Other clocks struck, jangling one after another. The whole world seemed to ring with the news of her deceit

and his derision...He was bitten by a swarm of snakes, each more poisonous than the last. He stood in the doorway in the tremendous rain without moving. As the minutes passed, he sagged a little at the knees. The downpour rushed on. In the thick of it, great guns seemed to boom. Huge noises as of the tearing and rending of oak trees could be heard. There were also wild cries and terrible inhuman groanings. (61)

Orlando likens Sasha's leaving to mockery and humiliation, reminded with every clock bell of her *deceit* and *his derision*; time literally taunts Orlando. The breakdown of Orlando and Sasha as a collective unconsciously propels Orlando to *doom*. As they associate *truth* with *great guns* booming, *wild cries*, and *terrible inhuman groanings*, Orlando mourns not only their fleeting relationship with Sasha but also their personal truth as something that is disposable, exasperating, and never to be uncovered again in order to avoid disappointment. As the River Thames melts away so does the Elizabethan era as weather advances time and Orlando, quickly and uncontrollably. As Orlando drops *at the knees* and a *downpour* of rain rushes on, time figuratively falls over the body in an effort to capture Orlando's grief of fleeting truth and existence. Time comes in the form of rain; Orlando remains static as time passes over them rapidly. At this moment, Orlando's choice is to submit to time as they fall to their knees in order to grapple with the reality of their loss. They unconsciously lose any point of reference to their past other than their moment of integrity with Sasha.

### **“The Oak Tree”: Orlando's Masochistic Construction of the Past in the Present**

Lines of affinity between Orlando's idealizations about the future, truth, and self-preservation aid in categorizing Orlando's downward spiral as a hyper-example of the queer ephemeral. Due to their passionate and self-fulfilling encounter with Sasha, Orlando is only able to imagine one future for himself; they are only able to see a world where happiness is achieved

through ecstatic collectivity, melding multiple futures and truths that are possible in their never-ending immortal calendar. Though representative of a moment of ecstatic time, Orlando's rendezvous with Sasha is associated with fantasy; Orlando finds it impossible to ever unearth something so fulfilling, erotic, and euphoric as their sense of completeness with Sasha. Although Sasha is gone, Orlando is still categorized as *other* by the society they were once a part of. Orlando is subsequently banished from the royal court and returns to their estate after the collapse of their relationship. They fall into a deep sleep for seven days, unable to be awoken by dogs and servants. The biographer describes,

But if sleep it was, of what nature, we can scarcely refrain from asking, are such sleeps as these? Are they remedial measures - trances in which the most galling memories, events that seem likely to cripple life forever are brushed with a dark wing which rubs their harshness off and gilds them, even the ugliest, and basest, with a lustre, an incandescence? Has the finger of death to be laid on the tumult of life from time to time lest it rend us asunder? ... And then what strange powers are these that penetrate our most secret ways and change our most treasured possessions without our willing it? And if so, of what nature is death and of what nature life? (67-69)

The biographer's rhetorical questioning frames Orlando's slumber as a blip of death, allowing Orlando's *most treasured possessions*, such as their newly emerged queer self, to perish. Despite Orlando's immortality enabling them to defy the strains of time, they are incapable of seeing the potential multiplicity of their life as they unconsciously kill their past self in order to move on; Orlando's prolonged sleep parallels *remedial measures to the finger of death*. However, as much as Orlando wishes to move time forward, they long for the ecstatic time that consumed them so effortlessly. Their own existence is as ephemeral as the plane of time they exist in.

Orlando masochistically engages with nostalgia for ecstatic time by evoking *erotohistoriography*, which Freeman defines as “distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times... [It] does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid” (95). As ecstatic time is something that cannot be recreated, Orlando is nostalgic for a past self from which they are removed; the past cannot be touched, only longed for. When Orlando emerges from their slumber, they treat the present itself as *hybrid* by analyzing their existence as newly incomplete, associating their solitude with impermanence. The present becomes as fleeting as the past, and as we will see, the future. While their prolonged sleep was an effort to rid themselves of grief and mourning for Sasha, Orlando awakens dreadful for the future, anxious to achieve any sense of stability in their life. They venture to their estate’s crypts, looking at the remains of their ancestors. The biographer describes, “Nothing remains of all these Princes,’ Orlando would say, indulging in some pardonable exaggeration of their rank, ‘except one digit,’ and he would take a skeleton hand in his and bend the joints this way and that” (71). Orlando physically engages with the past by encountering skeletons of ancestors as they bend and twist its fingers. They equate the brevity of their queer self with the brevity of their life as they were transpersonally bent and twisted by Sasha. Freeman further elaborates on *erotohistoriography*, writing, “It sees the body as method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations” (96). As Orlando holds the skeleton hand, they bring nostalgia and futurity together in the present, looking to the past whilst looking to the future; Orlando’s fear of impermanence, whether it be of the physical or transpersonal self, becomes a driving force in the trajectory of their immortal life.

Orlando's masochistic lens on the past and future manifests in their construction of a masterful poem, titled "The Oak Tree," which creates an atmosphere that Orlando can control and manipulate while never losing sight of its trajectory. To Orlando, their ephemeral existence halts when they add to their work. They attempt to control their own futurity which in the queer ephemeral timeline is an impossible feat. Thus, Orlando attempts to construct a utopia in their work, developing an atmosphere that can only be transformed by themselves. As "The Oak Tree," is an incredibly long poem rather than a novel, Orlando's work lacks a linear narrative. Images, memories, and allusions can appear and reappear in the poem's fabric, proving that Orlando's attempt to work through their past is more complicated than they think. Ben Anderson's analysis of aesthetic objects as affective atmospheres aid in looking at "The Oak Tree" as an object of collective futurity, stating, "The singular affective quality of an aesthetic object is 'open' to being 'apprehended' through feeling or emotions. What is interesting about this account... is that atmospheres are unfinished because of the constitutive openness to be taken up in experience. Atmospheres are indeterminate" (79). Nevertheless, "The Oak Tree" both inhibits and encourages Orlando's personal idealizations of the future. Instead of embracing their unpredictable and indeterminate transpersonal self, Orlando blindly constructs a work that attempts to hold equal, if not more, collective completeness than Sasha's entire existence. Orlando's personal idealizations of the future come to harness markers of Sasha, causing them to forever desire her; as Orlando becomes obsessed with finding an encounter that holds the essence of Sasha's, they are unable to productively picture themselves apart from the collective ecstatic energy she brought. Orlando cannot comprehend that Sasha's atmosphere will always be *indeterminate*.

Freeman writes of the potential for collective queer time in regards to Orlando, stating that it is “an uneven transmission of receptivity rather than authority or custom, of a certain enjoyably porous relation to unpredictable futures or to new configurations of the past (109). As Orlando was receptive to Sasha’s aura entirely, they attempt to block any existence of her in their writing process, which proves to be impossible. Thus, Orlando’s construction of “The Oak Tree” serves as a masochistic configuration of the past. Their uncertainty over Sasha drives their writing as the biographer recounts, “Where was she; and why had she left him? Was the Ambassador her uncle or her lover? Had they plotted? Was she forced? Was she married? Was she dead? All of which so drove their venom into him that, as if to vent his agony...” (79). As Orlando finds pleasure in their narrative agency, they find pain in their memories of Sasha. Nostalgia is associated with *venom*, but rather than poisoning Orlando, nostalgia allows Orlando to *vent* their agony; “The Oak Tree” brings them pain and pleasure. Even though “The Oak Tree” enables Orlando to cultivate an untouchable collective, queer truth and belonging remain forever fleeting to them as they are unreceptive to the erratic nature of their future.

### **Time’s Toy: Orlando’s Endless Search for Truth**

Orlando further attempts to render themselves impervious to transpersonal intruders in an effort to sustain personal stability which, as stated before, is impossible. When they are appointed as an Ambassador in Constantinople, Orlando is unable to relish in their newfound power as they feel inadequate in achieving full gratification without queer collectivity. When abroad, Orlando is unable to generate connections with the subjects around them, unconsciously blocking any potential for multiple encounters; instead, Orlando focuses on finding an impossible utopia that mimics Sasha’s essence. The biographer narrates,

He became the adored of many women and some men. It was not necessary that they should speak to him or even that they should see him; they conjured him up before them especially when the scenery was romantic, or the sun was setting, the figure of a noble gentleman in silk stockings...But this romantic power, it is well known, is often associated with a nature of extreme reserve. Orlando seems to have made no friends. As far as is known, he formed no attachments. (125)

Orlando is associated with a *romantic power*, their aura representative of romantic settings (beauty), material seduction (silk stockings), and nobility; instead of leaning into these charming and attracting characteristics, Orlando meets their counterparts with *extreme reserve*. Distinction is made between *friends* and *attachments*. As *friends* are to be *made*, *attachments* are to be *formed*. Orlando fails at both; they suppress their romantic power in order to avoid extending themselves to another. Orlando's resistance to form an attachment implies a level of agency they believe they harness. However, Orlando's unreceptiveness to transpersonal offerings proves to be no match for the construct of time they so much defy.

As much as Orlando moves through space and time, there is a sense that they stay stationary throughout the story as people come in and out of their life; Orlando's navigation through time becomes a source of frustration. Orlando, though immortal and ever-changing, is used as a toy by time; time pushes Orlando to search for purpose, permanency, and inevitably, truth. Orlando's synonymous association of their own futurity with the concept of truth stresses the impossibility of pin-pointing a reachable and stable queer utopia; their definition of utopia is always displaced. This displacement is furthered by the iconic gender transition scene of the novel. Nevertheless, Orlando becomes an object of time, an artifact of impossible defiance, in this case, manipulated by time physically. When the Turks attack the British embassy, Orlando



falls into another deep sleep; instead of being confronted by intruders, time manifests in the gods of Truth, Candour, and Honesty and their messengers, Lady of Purity, Lady of Chastity, and Lady of Modesty, who ironically confuse the reader and Orlando by blurring the truth they seek to uncover. The instance of the miraculous gender transitions reads,

With gestures of grief and lamentation the three sisters now join hands and dance slowly, tossing their veils and singing as they go:

“Truth, come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear. Hide Hide Hide!”

Here they make as if to cover Orlando with their draperies. The trumpets, meanwhile, still blare forth:

“The Truth and nothing but the Truth.”

As thus the Sisters try to cast their veils over the mouths of the trumpets so as to muffle them, but in vain, for now, all trumpets blare forth together...

We are, therefore, now left entirely alone in the room with the sleeping Orlando and the trumpeters. The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast:-

“The Truth!”

at which Orlando woke.

He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess - he was a woman. (136-137)

Truth emerges as a contradictory force as the three sisters tell truth to both hide and flaunt its rays; as truth *makes the dark clear*, Purity, Chastity, and Modesty seek to muffle its trumpets *in vain*. This scene is bizarre in that truth is painted as an unconventional and dangerous authority, contrasting greatly with purity, chastity, and modesty. As Orlando awakens to the sound of *The Truth*, the biographer suggests that they have indeed achieved truth but in actuality, Orlando is farther from it than they started. Time comes in the form of these gods and ladies, bringing a false sense of truth. Orlando's spiral in the queer ephemeral is sustained with their distorted vision of futurity as achieving one *single* truth which the gender transition scene so overwhelmingly supports.

However, theorist Judith Butler challenges gender as truth, deeming the construct as compilation of performative actions, writing,

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*. (180)

Following Butler's logic, the construct of gender prevents the possibilities of selfhood from being fully realized. As Orlando's queerness is constantly concealed by gender switches, they come to associate each switch with truth; they are blind to their potential radical and incredible renderings of their queerness. Orlando's static existence is brought on by their misinterpretation

of truth by assuming that they can only harness *one* singular truth; in all actuality, they are able to harness an infinite amount. Nevertheless, Orlando's truths unknowably come to form one on top of the other. Orlando remains oblivious to their personal multiplicity.

Orlando's attempts to remain unreceptive and impermeable to time, whether through avoiding attachments to be formed or masochistically re-configuring the past in "The Oak Tree," make it impossible for them to see personal truth and legacy in themselves, causing them to always search for a queer collective that is always fleeting. In a moment of both defeat and triumph, Orlando embarks on a walk that brings them ecstasy & pain as well as solitude & collectivity, emulating the paradoxical nature of the queer ephemeral.. Whilst collecting bird feathers that remind them of their youth, "some strange ecstasy" comes over them (248). The biographer states, "Some wild notion she had of following the birds to the rim of the world, and flinging herself on the spongy turf and there drinking forgetfulness, while the rooks' hoarse laughter sounded over her. She quickened her pace; she ran; she tripped; the tough heather roots flung her to the ground. Her ankle was broken. She could not rise" (248). Orlando desires to *fling* themselves out of the present and when they attempt to figuratively *fling* themselves, they trip and break their ankle; time traps them again. *Forgetfulness* becomes linked to gratification, implying that Orlando's past memories prevent them from attaining personal freedom. While Orlando sits helpless with their broken ankle, they reflect: "I have found my mate," she murmured. "It is the moor. I am nature's bride...I shall dream wild dreams. My hand shall wear no wedding ring,... I have sought happiness through my ages and not found it; fame and missed it; love and not known it; life - and behold, death is better" (248-249). Orlando aligns death with *wild dreams* and *solitude*, things that once brought them so much life. In this moment, Orlando envisions a world where they can relish in unpredictable singularity; their queer collectivity is formed with

the natural world around them. Although Orlando holds bitterness in their solitude, this episode is Orlando at their most triumphant as they begin to depart from their nostalgia and queer longing; their queerness begins to exist on its own plane with little need to fit into straight time due to their dismissal of marriage and embrace of the natural world. Orlando's perception of the natural world holds no markers of contemporary society; their queerness is able to finally exist fully. However, Orlando is found by Marmaduke Bonthrom Shelmerdine and elope within minutes. As their genders switch again, Orlando falls into a queer collective that is as ambiguous and passionate than ever, completing Orlando's essence but returning them to the queer ephemeral scope that inevitably falls into the heteronormative time trap they long to escape from.

Orlando's concept of truth and queer existence that hinders them throughout the novel is that there is *one* truth, *one* future, and *one* form of existence. This idea of singular futurity vanishes when, nearing the end of the novel, Orlando walks into a shop and smells a candle that reminds them of Sasha and the biographer reflects on Orlando's personal and transpersonal state as something that has emerged and evolved time and time again:

But it is not altogether plain sailing, either, for though one may say, as Orlando said (being out in the county and needing another self presumably) Orlando? still the Orlando she needs may not come; these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will...for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him - and some are too wildly ridiculous to be mentioned at all. (308-309)

*Built up, on top of another*, Orlando's multiplicity stresses the notion that locating *one* ideal is inevitably impossible and one must embrace the unpredictable nature of the queer ephemeral in

order to survive it. In this sense, Orlando, as Sedgwick defines, is a *textured* object. She writes, “Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold...in the making of the textured object” (14). Orlando’s multiplicity is a result of uncontrollable extension of the self and unpredictable transpersonal encounters that aid in forming the evolving queer subject. The biographer’s acknowledgement of this multiplicity allows Orlando to transcend straight time through embracing this uncontrollable cycle. However, this sense of agency within the queer ephemeral is presented with utter falsehood.

At the end of the novel, Orlando bears a baby boy, causing them to fall back into the fabric of straight time. In Lee Edelman’s “The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive,” he writes, “Historically constructed...to serve as the figural repository for sentimentalized cultural identifications, the child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom that order must be held in perpetual trust. The image itself...works to discipline political discourse by cosigning it always to accede in advance to the reality of a collective futurity” (289-290). As Orlando’s entire fragmented existence has posed themselves in opposition to reproductive lineage, they come to hold a symbol of social order within them, furthering the collective futurity of heteronormative time. Thus, Orlando’s destiny comes to revolve around her child and raising her within the hegemonic cultural order their destiny once dismissed. Orlando’s search for queer collectivity is paused through their embodiment of the physical and respected collective of parent & child. For how long is their search paused however? If Orlando is immortal, does this mean the baby is also immortal? Does Orlando begin to age when she becomes pregnant? These are questions that are

never answered by the biographer. If we are to logically assume that Orlando's child will also be immortal, then we can conclude that Orlando's queer multiplicity will forever be fleeting as long as they have the child. Orlando's lost sense of agency that they had in their isolated singularity vanishes as they become entrenched in straight time forever. Their ephemerality, nevertheless, will always project them to look back and masochistically engage with nostalgia. We can assume Orlando will never feel the ecstasy they felt with Sasha; Orlando will always look back and ponder what could have been. Nevertheless, they will always be stuck in the queer ephemeral cycle of looking back as ideas of queer futurity vanish before their eyes.

# Grief

**“I See an Illusion”:**

**Rageful Reconfiguration of the  
Transfeminine in *Una mujer fantástica***

“In birthing my rage, my rage has rebirthed me.”

Susan Stryker

42°49'14.1"N 73°56'01.3"W

In Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*, grief over lost queer collectives festers in Orlando's active reworking of nostalgia and longing for each transpersonal encounter as they strive to recreate past moments of ecstasy in the present. Ecstasy is linked to Orlando's queerness constantly becoming and unbecoming; Orlando mourns the figurative death of their past selves and the moments that accompany them. However, Orlando's time to grieve the ephemeral nature of their queer existence is minimal as their grievances appear unconsciously. We are never given a space outside of the figurative and hypothetical world Orlando inhabits to acknowledge grief as a critical component of the queer ephemeral. In another sense, Orlando moves on; rather than confronting their grief and the frustration that accompanies it, Orlando remains entrapped in the cycle of time they defy. *Moving on* becomes a coping mechanism for Orlando's queerness to continue to exist. Nevertheless, Orlando believes queerness must transcend time in order to remain valid or alive. Queer collectivity and the validity it ascribes to its subjects have a complicated relationship. The absence of queer collectivity does not invalidate or weaken individual queerness but it does influence individual identity. Orlando takes the majority of the novel to recognize their own singular multiplicity and even when we reach the end, we see their recognition of their multiplicity dwindle away in the distance. In other words, queer collectivity consistently validates the queerness of queer subjects as its absence causes the queer subject to search for collectivity within themselves.

While Orlando's sense of grief is highly figurative, it becomes crucial to pinpoint a literal example of the affinity of grief towards the queer ephemeral. Chilean director Sebastián Lelio's 2017 film *Una mujer fantástica* (A Fantastic Woman) tells the story of a young transgender woman named Marina who navigates the loss of her partner, Orlando, through grief and rage in Santiago. Lelio's Orlando does not hold any relation to Virginia Woolf's Orlando previously



discussed in this thesis. The film received critical acclaim upon its release, subsequently winning the award for Best Foreign Language Film at the 90th Academy Awards. *Una mujer* also spearheaded the passing of a Chilean law allowing transgender citizens over the age of 14 to change their name and gender on government documents in a timely manner (Cambero 2018). Despite its numerous accolades and acclaim, *Una mujer fantástica* is an artifact of queer grief and its relationship with the ephemeral nature of queer collectivity. Marina's life is completely altered as a result of Orlando's death as she lacks the civil rights to control Orlando's assets, service, and in turn, her own grieving; as Marina and Orlando were dating outside of a civil union or marriage, Orlando's family quickly obtains control of his estate and attempts to erase Marina from his past through transphobia and her lack of legal agency. Left alone to navigate her transness in a state of loss, Marina's journey through grief propels her to search for queer collectivity in herself and mourn Orlando.

In delineating Marina's lost sense of validity as a result of her lost collectivity, it is imperative to note that Marina's trans selfhood does not disappear with Orlando's death; her queerness is left fragmented and then subsequently reconfigured throughout the film. This notion of trans validity is heavily explored in Halberstam's "The transgender gaze in *Boys Don't Cry*," where they analyze the controversial 1997 Kimberly Pierce film. As Pierce's depiction of Brandon Teena is problematic due to its lack of transgender voices, overt violence on the trans body, and heterosexual overtones, she conveys the transgender gaze only through the eyes of a heterosexual woman. In other words, Brandon's transness is only validated through Lana's gaze. Halberstam writes, "Not only does *Boys* create a transgender subject position which is fortified by the traditional operations of the gaze and the conventional modes of gendering, it also makes the transgender subject dependent upon the recognition of a woman" (296). In contrast, in *Una*

*mujer fantástica*, Marina does not rely on Orlando's recognition of her transness in order to validate herself, but instead, views Orlando as a counterpart to her queerness. His absence causes her to literally *have* nothing, in regards to his home and assets, and to figuratively *have* her own queerness. Nevertheless, Orlando's mortality causes Marina's life to unravel in episodes of transferring material possessions of Orlando along with her selfhood to out-of-touch family members and the state; Marina is forced to *move on* but is unsure how. *Moving on* becomes a means of survival for Marina as she loses visions of a queer utopia that was once in arm's reach. In this chapter, I argue that grief is a critical component of the queer ephemeral and is generative of the cycle of self emergence noted earlier in this thesis. In conjunction with Susan Stryker's definition of transgender rage, we are able to see how Marina's incapability to grieve in relation to her transness because of hegemonic oppression causes her immense frustration. As the film progresses and Marina grows more and more upset with her inescapability of the queer ephemeral and inability to fit into straight time, she is forced to reconfigure her transness. By the end of the film, Marina comes to emerge as a new transfeminine, ever-changing and always *becoming*.

### **Orlando and Marina's Brief Encounter**

Orlando dies on Marina's birthday and with him dies Marina's sense of stability, belonging, and a certain queerness. The loss of Orlando leaves Marina's identity fragmented, causing her to reconfigure her selfhood. Marina spends most of the film attempting to sustain a version of herself that is no longer until she realizes that she must reconfigure herself in order to move on. In Sara Ahmed's "Queer Feelings," she writes,

So to lose another is not to lose one's impression, not all of which are even conscious. To preserve an attachment is not to make an external other internal, *but to keep one's*

*impressions alive*, as aspects of one's self that are both oneself and more than oneself, as a sign of one's debt to others. One can let go of another as an outsider, but maintain one's attachments, by keeping alive one's impressions of the lost other...To grieve for others is to keep their impressions alive in the midst of their death. (434)

Orlando leaves an *impression* on Marina. Impression connotes pressure and molding, a mark of something that was once there but is no longer. The viewer is only able to see the active impressing of Orlando on Marina briefly in the beginning of the film; we only come to know Marina without Orlando. We observe Orlando and Marina going out for dinner, dancing together at a bar, and sharing intimate moments with each other. In this limited window we are given into their relationship, Marina and Orlando's collectivity is paralleled with paradise. On the night of her birthday, Marina performs for a full bar, is correctly addressed by restaurant servers, and is "given" a present by Orlando. This gift, a trip to Iguazu Falls, comes to be the only thing of Orlando's that Marina can call her own. However, this present is not given to her completely as Orlando misplaces the envelope with the actual tickets. Marina's search for the actual tickets to the Falls is symbolic in that it encapsulates her desire to experience Orlando's lasting impression upon her. Imagery of the Falls is presented to the viewer within the very first frames of the film, a space that Marina never comes to inhabit. Orlando and his gift of a literal trip to paradise become ghosts that flash before Marina's eyes on multiple occasions in the form of dream sequences, scenes that incorporate fantastic elements the rest of the film lacks. Muñoz defines ghosts as "a familiar yet otherworldly affective function that leaves a certain ephemeral trace" (42). The physical tickets become as ephemeral as Orlando, extending Marina into different spaces, such as the sauna locker room, where her queer selfhood fades away as Orlando's impression disappears. The familiarity of her collective with Orlando necessarily turns

otherworldly as she navigates her grief when he is no longer corporeally present. Marina enveloped Orlando and Orlando enveloped Marina; without Orlando, Marina is forced to rid herself of a queer collective that altered her trans feminine aura.

### **Marina's Transness & the State**

Marina's rageful grief is born out of her frustration with her lack of power and agency over her grief. Ahmed writes, "Queer loss may not count *because it precedes a relation of having,*" and to Orlando's family, Marina's loss does not count (431). Orlando's estate is left to Sonia, his ex-wife and Gabo, his brother. When Marina brings Orlando to the hospital after a sudden brain aneurysm, she is ushered out of the premises as she is not legally bound to Orlando. As a result, she runs away from the hospital, only for the police to later usher her back for questioning, criminalizing her transness in relation to Orlando's passing. The question that arises and is never answered is why she runs. She enters the hospital, only to be ejected out into the world with no direction and no realized personal purpose, akin to a newborn; Marina's fleeing can be viewed as a moment of rebirth. She runs aimlessly through the streets only to be stopped by societal order; her transness cannot exist apart from the state. When she is initially questioned by officers who note the inconsistency of her documents, her identity becomes subject to the state. From this moment on, Marina's identity, motives, and life are constantly questioned by the subjects around her; her capacity for other people to recognize her transness gets displaced onto the state. Her queerness is hollowed out, in the sense that Marina begins to view herself as nothing more than a "monster" and inconvenience to the people "in" Orlando's life. In order to fill the void that Orlando left, Marina finds agency in her rage; the violent stripping away of Orlando also strips away Marina's sense of ever *having* love, stability, and validity.

This violent dismantling of Marina's world by the state and out-of-touch relatives disrupts Marina's continuity of her lost queer collectivity. Her grief is not validated because of the queer nature of her relationship and the demonization of her transness. Ahmed describes queer loss, writing, "Loss implies the acknowledgement of the desirability of what was once had: one may have to love in order to lose. As such, the failure to recognize queer loss *as* loss is also a failure to recognize queer relationships as significant bonds, or that queer lives are worth living..." (431). Marina is forced to grieve alone as she receives no public recognition to grieve. Orlando's ex-wife and family's re-possession of his estate invalidates Marina's grief as all tangible ties to him vanish. Marina's *bond* with Orlando does not exist to his family. However, Marina does not feel the need to prove her relationship to them; rather she attempts to claim the public grief that should be allotted to her. In Marina's eyes, she will grieve and she will do it as publicly as she can because her loss is grief-worthy; the state does not have any right to intrude on her grief. These public moments of grief come only twice throughout the film and from them, rage and frustration become dominant forces pulling Marina towards closure over her lost queer collective.

### **Transgender Rage as Generative**

Marina's rage and her transness are deeply intertwined. In "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," Susan Stryker links transness and monstrosity, reclaiming the ostracization of the trans body by hegemonic institutions. She states,

In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well,

my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist. (245)

Marina's identification as a *monster* stems from the exclusion of her voice and existence from the canon of grief. The gaze from the state and Orlando's family situates Marina as *other* and without Orlando's presence grounding Marina in her identity, her transness is dissected and abused. Her body is exploited and examined by the police in an effort to catalog her transness. Both the detective and the doctor do not know how to refer to Marina, the doctor frightened by her ambiguity. As the law is held above Marina's head (if she refused examination she would be taken to jail), she is unable to escape the fearful cis gaze when attempting to navigate her queerness in crisis. Ultimately, her queerness becomes co-opted by the state. Rather than hers, her transness is theirs.

It is crucial to note how lost Marina is without Orlando. From the moment Marina is ejected from the hospital, she is constantly in transit. On buses, in cars, on foot, from place-to-place, the viewer spends time with Marina in motion. The camera focuses on her eyes, watching people pass, thinking to herself where she *has* to go next. She does not provide any monologues or even really speaks about what she is experiencing. Instead, the viewer is invited into her transfeminine aura, viewing her interactions, flashbacks, and travel with her. Marina's silence carries over into her conversations with Sonia and Orlando's son Bruno, where they both position her as a monstrous villain, to the structure of their family and to society. When Bruno intrusively asks Marina if she "had gone under the knife," she quickly responds, "You don't ask that," dismissing the conversation all together. As Bruno physically invades Orlando's home, which is also Marina's, he figuratively invades her anatomy by asking intimate details about her genitalia. Marina's blunt dismissal to forward and prying transphobic remarks continues with her

encounter with Sonia as she gives her the keys to Orlando's car; in this moment, her mobility is stripped from her as well as the last symbolic space she and Orlando existed together. Sonia likens Orlando and Marina's relationship as "perversion," stating "When I see you, I don't know what I see...I see an illusion." And when Sonia apologizes, Marina says, "Nothing to be sorry about. It's *normal*." As viewers, we understand the nuances of Marina's statement but Sonia's silence implies she does not. Nevertheless, Marina's remarks are lost in *trans*-lation. Stryker writes of the linguistics of transgender rage, explaining that it "can never claim quite so secure a means of resistance because of the inability of language to represent the transgendered subject's movement over time between stably gendered positions in a linguistic structure" (247). Stryker faults cisgender, heteronormative, patriarchal language as failing to accurately account for any trans experience; in Marina's case, Sonia and Bruno strip her of her own emotions, her own experiences, and her own identity. Marina's *movement* through the world, specifically as a grieving partner, is misunderstood by Sonia and Bruno--who, if we follow Stryker's argument to its logical conclusion, are ill-equipped linguistically to even engage with Marina. To them, the illusion of Marina does not warrant the same emotions and movement through time as it does cis-gendered individuals. Thus, queerness, specifically queer grief is incapable of existing within straight time. Nevertheless, Marina is forced to grieve in a space that looks and feels different from hegemonic time - the *fantastic*.

Marina's isolation hits its peak when she is attacked by Bruno and other distant relatives of Orlando. As Marina is shoved into the back of a pickup truck and brutally called a variety of slurs, the men in the car wrap tape around her head; her hair falls over her stretched and compressed face, obscuring her vision. The Marina the viewer has come to know throughout the film is unrecognizable. As her selfhood and identity have become distorted to Marina, her

physical appearance does as well. When the men drop Marina off in a back alley, she harnesses little to no hope for the future; she is left a fragmented shell. However, when Marina stumbles upon a parked car, she makes contact with her reflection in its window. As she pulls the tape off her face, she does maintain eye contact with her reflection; Marina actively recovers her existence, igniting visibility of her transness to herself. In essence, Marina reconfigures her isolated identity as her own; her perceived monstrous existence serves to empower her. It is here where Marina claims agency over her grief and queerness as she begins to locate collectivity and multiplicity within herself.

### **Marina's *Fantastic* Transfeminine Reconfiguration**

Marina's rebirth and reconfiguration of her transness exists on two distinct planes, the real and the fantastic. The viewer experiences Marina's lost self through dream sequences or visions that embody her evolving trans feminine aura. Reality and the fantastic are syncopated in relation to Marina's rebirth and reclamation of her grief, transness, and personal collectivity. Her visions are in-sync with her real evolution; Marina *as monster* transfigures to Marina *as fantastic*. Stryker links transsexual monstrosity to the incredible, writing,

“Monster” is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, “divine portent,” itself formed on the root of *monere*, “to warn.” It came to refer to living things of anomalous shape or structure, or to fabulous creatures like the sphinx who were composed of strikingly incongruous parts, because the ancients considered the appearance of such beings to be a sign of some impending supernatural event. Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation, saying, in effect, “Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening. (247)



In relation to Orlando's ghosts, Marina likens her lost collectivity to the extraordinary. When visions of Orlando begin to appear, Marina is often in a state of paralysis, frozen in her grief. However, when her visions begin to include her in them as an active participant, Marina takes on an extraordinary essence. Marina's rebirth, founded in her discovery of queer collectivity within herself, is the *impending event of profound importance*. She finds wholeness in both reality and her fantastic psyche, through rage and her reconfigured trans identity respectively. Both planes exist in harmony but warrant different outcomes.

When Marina finally strips the tape off her face, she wanders Santiago and stumbles into a gay club, locating queer collectivity underground, in the midst of flashing lights and strangers. She falls into the arms of various men, walking through corridors filled with people conversing and kissing; their facial features are difficult to decipher due to the chaotic light spectrum of the club scene. When Marina emerges from hooking up with a stranger, she moves to the dance floor, and in the distance sees a vision of Orlando staring at her. At this very moment, the sounds of the club fall into the void of Marina's state of paralysis and she realizes that she must locate new collectivity within herself. Instead of advancing towards Orlando, Marina closes her eyes and continues to dance. She is suddenly dressed in tinsel and dancing in a group of people dressed like her; she moves in sync with the people around her and is raised up to the camera. She stares at the viewer as the people behind her blur into one; Marina claims her queerness, transness, and existence to the audience. Her personal multiplicity is implied by the subjects that surround her; Marina's wholeness begins to emerge through her singularity. This dream sequence of Marina as *fantastic*, captured in flight, decked out in costume and beauty, pushes her forward towards reconfiguring her queerness. As she struggles to sustain Orlando's impression and grieve his loss in Chilean society, Marina is forced to look internally in order to *move on*.

Though these *fantastic* moments that occur throughout the film allow progress and push Marina towards reconfiguring her queerness, they don't quite get her there despite how powerful they appear. Before Marina is physically assaulted, she turns down Gabo's offer of giving her some of Orlando's ashes, suggesting that her grief looks different than *straight* grief; at this point in the film, Marina does not even know what her queer grief looks like. When she walks to her vocal teacher's apartment and sings "Heavens, what did I do?" and ponders why she is experiencing this hardship off loss, she is pictured walking against extraordinary winds. She pushes her body weight against the force against her, claiming her stance and her desire to *move on*. This fantastic moment projects her to go to Orlando's wake which inevitably leads to the violent acts committed against her. However, as I described before, her fantastic visions claim her space again and again despite the setbacks she experiences.

Similar to Woolf's Orlando, Marina is unaware of what she must do in order to find peace in her present state. Orlando's fleeting impression still dominates Marina's psyche and rightfully so, however her grief and mourning grow and grows throughout the film rather than settling into the fabric of her new solitude and present. She desires to escape yet Orlando's grip remains tight. When Marina seeks refuge with her sister, she is read information of Orlando's funeral service when Gaston, her brother-in-law, exclaims, "Don't go there. That would be masochistic." Her sister responds, "Define masochism." and Gaston describes, "People who like to suffer. Do you enjoy pain?" Marina brushes off the conversation, convincing herself, her sister, and Gaston, that she will not go. However, she repeats to herself, "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day." Nevertheless, her rage finds its place in her mourning for Orlando; Marina feels that she must fight to grieve like any other member of his family in order to achieve peace. Stryker further describes transgender rage writing,

Transgender rage is queer fury, an emotional response to conditions to which it becomes imperative to take up, for the sake of one's own continued survival as a subject, a set of practices that precipitates one's exclusion from a naturalized order of existence that seeks to maintain itself as the only possible basis for being a subject. However, by mobilizing gendered identities and rendering them provisional, open to strategic development and occupation, this rage enables the establishment of subjects in new modes... (253)

Marina's transgender rage plays towards the heteronormative establishment that is taking Orlando away from her; she maintains herself as subject to the torment of Orlando's family. However, Marina is unknowably a provisional subject, her unconscious rendering her grief in a *new mode* apart from societal standards. Nevertheless, where Marina thinks she will find peace, attempting to go to Orlando's funeral and searching for her lost tickets, she does not. Rather, Marina locates her proper mourning from within.

Instead of Marina viewing herself and Orlando as a collective, she views Orlando as something she had *had*; grief, to Marina, warrants possession. This is largely due to Orlando's family revoking her right to grieve alongside them, essentially removing all evidence of Marina from Orlando's life and vice versa. In reference to Ahmed's notion of *having*, Marina's search for the lost tickets is linked to her desire to continue to hold onto Orlando. Nevertheless, her grief manifests in lost materiality. To an extent, the tickets would allow for Marina to grieve on her own terms as Orlando's family does not know of their existence. However, her inability to find them proves the ephemerality of her grief; her grief, time and time again, does not come to exist apart from her internal visions.

Before Marina hands over Orlando's car to Sonia, she finds an unknown key on the floor. Throughout the film, we catch Marina glancing at the key, wondering what it is for. When she

discovers that the key is from Orlando's sauna locker, she believes that the tickets have been left in the locker and decides to retrieve them. On her way to the sauna, she passes by a mirror that distorts her reflection; this foreshadows the disillusionment of her transness that occurs in the locker room. Despite Marina resolidifying her transness by *seeing* herself in the mirror's reflection, she strips it away in order to retrieve the tickets; Marina is forced to leave her selfhood behind. She enters the woman's room, lowers her towel, and enters the men's locker room. In this moment, Marina's *transness* enables her to pass between the genders. When she enters the key into the locker, it is empty. As Marina leaves, the empty locker fills the frame, representing her powerlessness in her grief and the tight grip of Orlando on her even though he is gone. The key to Marina and Orlando's paradise shows Marina that her paradise is no longer and that she must *move on*.

Marina *moves on* by ragefully reclaiming her grief from Orlando's family, but more importantly, by acknowledging the power of her singularity and the multiplicity of her transfeminine aura. When she arrives at the cemetery, Sonia, Bruno, and Gabo attempt to leave in Orlando's car. They express utter annoyance and disapproval when they see Marina. In the past, Marina's silence and dismissiveness towards Orlando's family has rendered her as subject to their torment. However, Marina jumps on to the car, demanding Orlando's dog be given to her. She jumps, stomps, bangs on the windshield, and stares into the eyes of the passengers. Here, Sonia, Gabo, and Bruno are subjects to Marina; they are below her and stare up as she rages atop of them. In this moment, Marina epitomizes Stryker's notion of transexual monstrosity as she publicly embodies her rage. Her anger allots visibility to her mourning as it has remained invisible to the people around her. Stryker notes, "The high price of whatever visible, intelligible, self-representation I have achieved makes the continuing experience of

invisibility maddeningly difficult to bear” (251). Marina’s frustration with the invisibility of her grief demands that she fight for its perceptibility; she must render her grief a different way than the heterosexual cis-gendered people around her in order for them to recognize it. However, Marina’s rage does not bring her fulfillment. This is the last moment we see Sonia, Gabo, and Bruno, and with their absence, Marina is able to triumphantly grieve on her own terms.

In a final vision of Orlando, Marina achieves fulfillment in her grief and a sense of completeness in her queerness - it can stand alone as her own, without Orlando. When she reaches his grave, Marina turns around to an image of Orlando watching over her. Akin to a ghost, Orlando draws Marina towards him as he descends into the crematorium of the cemetery. As Marina follows him, she finds herself against a wall, Orlando pushing himself upon her. At first Marina attempts to push him away; it is clear that she resents Orlando due to the pain and torment he has brought upon her. However, she allows herself to fall into Orlando. Once again, they envelop each other, out of sight from others; their collectivity is able to exist for one, final time. This exchange between Marina and her unconscious feels in sync as she embraces memories of Orlando’s touch, feel, and aura. As her mourning manifests in solitude, her interaction with Orlando’s ghost feels as if it is on her own terms, away from others’ scrutiny and dismissal. Ultimately, Orlando’s essence fully passes through Marina’s selfhood and through her *own* grief she finds fulfillment. When Marina watches Orlando’s body leave her line of sight, she cries for the first time in the entire movie. His impression is gone and Marina’s personal vulnerability and queerness manifest in her fantastic unconscious bringing her utter completeness.

The queer ephemeral is a trap, a cycle of love & loss, discovery & disillusionment of the self. It is seemingly endless and as we saw with Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, subjects are often

unknowable to the queer ephemeral's inescapable and vast extremities. In *Una mujer fantástica*, Marina's journey begins with loss, Orlando serving to strip her of her selfhood and personal identity. Throughout the film, we see Marina reorient herself, attempting to find fulfillment outside of her lost queer collectivity and validity of her transness. When Orlando dies, every part of his essence is taken away from Marina; something so transformative and all-consuming vanishes in thin air. As Marina is forced to live a life without Orlando, her rebirth attempts to transcend the ephemeral nature of her existence. This rebirth does not exist in Marina's relation to the counterparts around her. Rather, this rebirth finds Marina, using Stryker's words, *rendering* herself in a *new mode* of existing. Initially, she views grief as something that must be conquered; Marina must claim Orlando as hers in order to grieve him completely. When in all actuality, Marina becomes empowered when she finds the agency to grieve on her own terms, relishing in her loss, only to come out in solidarity with her singularity. Marina's grief manifests the most productive in the *fantastic* - the dream sequences that allow her to relish in memories of Orlando and that situate her as *otherworldly* and *powerful*. Marina's queer grief is pictured fantastically because it sits on a plane apart from traditional representations - she relishes in the ephemerality of her lost collective with Orlando.

Instead of the queer ephemeral triumphing over Marina, Marina triumphs over the queer ephemeral due her rebirth manifesting in her newfound rage. Stryker explains, "In birthing my rage, my rage has rebirthed me" (252). Marina's frustration with the structures around her, whether they be the laws that prevent her from changing her documents, societal transphobia, or Orlando's unpredictable death, causes her to lose grasp of her identity. However, her rage allows her to emerge as a new transfeminine. Marina does not triumph the queer ephemeral in the sense that she *defeats* it. Rather, she relishes in the act of *moving on*, something our past subjects have

struggled with. In *Una mujer fantástica*, moving on must occur in order for Marina to physically and emotionally survive. Marina achieves visibility over her own queer identity by redefining it; she grieves on her own terms and frees herself from the prejudice around her. Orlando's impression upon Marina will always be present but it loses its rigid arrangement in the fabric of her life. Their collectivity comes to achieve a certain fluidity, evident in Marina's irregular and unpredictable fantastic visions. Instead of reorienting and restructuring her nostalgia to bring the past to the present, Marina tears apart her nostalgia in order to emerge as transformed. Marina's transfeminine aura solidifies as Orlando's fleeting collectivity vanishes; her visibility is achieved through literal reflection of her physical body. Through the queer ephemeral, Marina is revealed to herself and the viewer as forever becoming; she is rebirthed out of her rage with the cycle of the queer ephemeral.

# Utopia

**Living in an Immaterial World:**

**Utopian Construction in**

***SOPHIE's Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides***

“Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer.”

José Esteban Muñoz

42°46'48.2"N 73°47'27.8"W



Utopia. A perfect place. An imagined space of harmony and peace. An always-transforming, idealized void that never comes to be. We dream of utopias to organize our desires and to cope with our current surroundings. Utopian thinking is a reflection on the past, an escape from the present, and a window into the future. Utopias are fantasies of our own ambitions, cravings, and passions, allowing these entities to exist on a plane separate from reality. With Arca, Orlando, and Marina, queerness becomes aligned with utopian thinking; Arca constructs a utopia where time is subject to her queerness, Orlando desires to find a lost utopia in the present, and Marina is able to grieve when she redefines her utopia on new terms of singularity. Through utopian construction, queerness emerges again and again, forever becoming into something new and unrealized. Muñoz writes of the relationship between queerness and utopianism:

“Queerness’s form is utopian. Ultimately, we must insist on a queer futurity because the present is so poisonous and insolvent. A resource that cannot be discounted to know the future is indeed the no-longer-conscious, that thing or place that may be extinguished but not yet discharged in its utopian potentiality” (30). Muñoz situates utopian thinking in the unconscious, allowing the subject to uncover new potentiality. Throughout my work, queer utopias exist in the *fantastic*, apart from *poisonous* heteronormative time. However, the fantastic elements that underline each of the subjects in this thesis are the only consistent component between them; each utopia looks and acts differently than their counterparts. Muñoz further describes utopian thinking, “To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity...” (26). Collective queer futurity does not exist in the sense that there is *one* desired queer utopia. Rather, collectivity exists in the infinite potentiality of what queer utopias can be; the possibilities are literally endless.

Utopias can be both internal and external as they represent how one would prefer to exist or where one would prefer to exist; utopian thinking is a search for a desired ‘state of being.’ The incapability of pinpointing one image of a queer utopia comes to light by looking closely at the late electronic music producer Sophie (stylized as SOPHIE) and her debut album *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides*, a supposed deliberate mondegreen for “I Love Every Person’s Insides.” I pay close attention to the structure of the album in relation to self-discovery and the formation of a certain queerness. This album marks Sophie’s first as an out transwoman; the track listing is representative of an internal timeline of her transition, marking the death of a past self and the birth of a new. Sophie is credited as a pioneer in electronic pop music, specifically, the genre of hyper-pop, a hybrid of pop and EDM infused with pitched vocals and disjointed sounds. She is most notably known for her melodies consisting of material sounds; followers of Sophie have called the sound of her music that of “pots and pans” (Moen 2021). Throughout *Un-Insides*, Sophie sonically constructs a queer utopia for her transness to exist and from the very physical sounds that she uses, the listener is able to acquire a minimal sense of what this utopia looks like in tracks such as “Faceshopping,” “Is It Cold In the Water?,” and “Infatuation.” By the end, Sophie deconstructs her queer utopia in anticipation of a new plane of existence for herself and her transness in “Immaterial.” The very material aestheticism in Sophie’s music allows her queerness to harness a level of permanency; we can sonically associate her production with physical materials and sounds such as water, metal, speaker vibrations and crackling, and industrial screeching. However, despite the physical nature of *Un-Insides*, its medium of music allows Sophie’s queer utopia to be misleadingly immaterial; it harnesses a paradoxicality where its fabric can be perceived--through sound and imagery--whilst remaining intangible as a whole,

coherent object. Thus, queer utopias, specifically Sophie's, remain entrenched in the queer ephemeral.

In "Faceshopping," Sophie separates her transness into her *real* physical presentation and *fantastic* internal essence, capturing the ephemerality of her queerness. Sophie declares at the beginning of the track, "My face is the front of shop / My face is the real shop front / My shop is the face I front / I'm real when I shop my face." First, Sophie validates her transness by commodifying her physical presentation; her face is associated with a shop front. As her corporeal form is likened to a site of exchange and transaction, Sophie chooses to align the surgical procedures that she has participated in with varying forms of artificial change; her body is added to and subtracted from. She distortedly lists, "Artificial Bloom / Hydroponic Skin / Chemical Release / Synthesise the Real / Plastic Surgery / Social Dialect / Positive Results / Documents of Life." Sophie frames her physical form as both real and artificial, suggesting that her physical transition serves to synthesize her transness with the *real documents* of life. While her transformed appearance validates her transness to herself, Sophie's altered body validates her queer existence to the public; her front facing appearance, or "shop," can be perceived by outsiders. The sonic void that Sophie constructs around her words consists of violent screeching as if her body resides in a vast industrial factory; Sophie emerges as something physically new, showing how artificial the seamless presentation of gender is.

Midway through "Faceshopping" the track interrupts its distorted and fragmented production with a cohesive light melody; the chords sound like falling glass and twinkling glitter. As her physical form is associated with artificial validity, Sophie's internal queerness converses with her external appearance during the bridge of the song; Sophie's external validation is tied to the simultaneous experience of her self-presentation and identity. She sings, "So you must be

the one that I've seen in my dreams / Come on / touch me / set my spirit free, Oh / test me/ Do you feel what I feel? / Do you see what I see? / Oh, reduce me to nothingness." Here, Sophie's internal queer spirit engages with her external appearance; her imagined visions of her transness come to exist in the real. Sophie's queerness is dreamed of and when that dream becomes a reality she orders her newfound selfhood to *reduce her to nothingness*; once Sophie's vision of a certain queerness becomes realized, a new one is bound to emerge. *Nothingness*, rather than motioning absence, represents a new space for an altered queer utopia to take shape as Sophie's transness is forever becoming despite her physical transformation.

The duality of Sophie's internal and external queer identity is furthered with "Is It Cold In The Water?" where fluidity and depth come to define her transness. In turn, Sophie's utopia is associated with the properties of an endless pool of water that envelops her entire essence. This pool brings Sophie differing sensations as she sings, "I'm freezing / I'm burning / I've left my home / Soft ache, me / Earth shaking / I feel alone." Sophie's engagement with her utopia brings her to two polar opposite feelings; her queerness brings her warmth as the world around brings her chills. Sophie's utopia emerges as a space where conceptual and physical notions of gender are blurred; femininity and masculinity are associated with warmth and chills. Sophie's departure from *home* suggests that her desired queerness does not exist in the same space. As she repeats "Is it cold in the water?" amidst a hypnotic sharp repeating synth, Sophie implies a sense of hesitancy before falling into her utopia; this is emphasized with her prolonged lyrical execution of *cold*. Instead of slipping into her queerness, Sophie creates tension between herself and the water implying that she will inevitably jump into its depths. She continues: "I'm falling / Depths endless / Worlds turn to smoke / One hundred years flicker / I kiss the snow." Sophie falls into the endless depths of her queerness; her identity transcends time as years flicker by, worlds

dissipate, and seasons change. The tension that Sophie created suddenly disappears when she declares, “I’m swimming / I’m breathing / evaporating...I’m liquid / I’m floating into the blue.” Her queerness becomes one with the utopian pool; Sophie acquires the properties of the watery material that is her identity. She learns to swim in the seemingly daunting waters of her queer utopia. Nevertheless, Sophie’s material association of her transness with utopia enables the listener to picture her ephemerality.

However, in “Infatuation,” Sophie’s queerness is as fleeting as ever and completely unrecognizable. As distorted vocals echo in the distance, the sounds of trickling water enter and exit Sophie’s sonic void, as if droplets are dripping off someone or something. She sings “waited and I waited...Infatuation / Who are you? / Deep down / I wanna know” as the instrumental surrounding her vocals intensifies with every command of *I wanna know*. Her vocals are distorted, excessively pitched to sound like an alien, like something *other*. An infatuation implies an intense obsession with someone or something. In Sophie’s case, she becomes infatuated with her newly emerged self. On time and utopianism, Muñoz writes “Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer” (26). Sophie’s queerness exists on another plane separate from reality; she desires to be present in a new time and new place. As the lyrics fade away into the background of the track, Sophie alludes to the ephemerality of her utopian vision of queerness as it ceases to take complete shape within straight time. Nevertheless, Sophie becomes infatuated with a vision of her queerness and even though she is able to figuratively see skeletons of its framework, her utopian dream ventures farther and farther away from her reach.

In Sophie’s case, utopias are constantly constructed and subsequently deconstructed in anticipation of the construction of a new one. Thus, due to their ephemeral structure, queer

utopias are constantly becoming. In “Immaterial,” Sophie contrasts the material nature of her record by claiming that she, and in turn, her utopia, are just that. “Immaterial” is the most commercial of the tracks on Sophie’s *Oils*, consisting of a thumping club beat and traditional structure of lyrics. As a choir of voices chant “Immaterial Boys, Immaterial Girls” throughout the song, Sophie sings, “You could be me and I could you / Always the same and never the same / Day by day, life after life / Without my legs or my hair / Without my genes or my blood / With no name and with no type of story / Where do I live?” Sophie plays off Madonna’s international 1984 hit “Material Girl” and instead of validating her queerness with material objects, finds fullness in the collective nature of her bare queerness. Sophie strips herself of her physical body allowing her internal queerness to exist by itself. She yells, “I can be anything I want / Anyhow, any place, anywhere, anyone.” Sophie deletes all notions of a tangible utopia for her transness to exist in; instead, Sophie relishes in the impermanency of her queerness. By the end of *Oil of Every Pearl’s Un-Insides*, Sophie’s visions of utopia do not ascribe to *one* form; they can look and feel like anything and everything. Thus, Sophie’s queer utopia will always be ephemeral, allowing her to emerge again and again and again.

## Conclusion

The queer ephemeral is overwhelming and confusing. It is tantalizing and terrifying. It is painful and it is pleasurable. It is a living and breathing paradox. It is a vast structure of contemplation. The queer ephemeral comes with many questions that have little to no answers. Queer subjects often ask themselves why? Why must time slip through our fingers? Why is our very existence so fleeting? Why do moments where we feel euphoric leave us feeling empty and lost? Queer subjects attempt time and time again to fit into the conventional and transcendent structure of straight time. And though queerness attempts constantly to embed itself within straight time's fabric, it simply cannot due to its very nature.

Over the course of *Mapping the Queer Ephemeral*, the fleeting qualities of queer selfhood have changed throughout each of the chapters. Through Arca, the queer ephemeral was presented as an entity that must be submitted to with no realistic avenue of triumphing its tight grip. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* exemplified the paradoxical nature of queer nostalgia and how memories of ecstasy and euphoria both stain and embellish queer lives. In *Una mujer fantástica*, grief over past moments of queer collectivity emerged as a generative force allowing for fantastic reconfigurations of the queer self. With the late Sophie, queer utopias fell into the framework of the queer ephemeral through their ever-changing cycle of construction and subsequent deconstruction. When each of these subjects fell into the deep waters of the queer ephemeral, they emerged as something new, something unrealized, something fantastic. In order for these queer individuals to emerge and reemerge again and again, they had to exist in a fantastical realm where hegemonic oppression ceased to exist. The queer ephemeral ultimately exposes the queer subject as never just *one* thing. As Sophie shouts at the end of "Immaterial," "I can be

anything I want,” the queer ephemeral emerges as a body that projects queerness into an endless state of *becoming*.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is imperative to acknowledge American novelist James Baldwin and the role of race within the structure of time. In the 1990 PBS Documentary, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*, Baldwin states, “What is it you wanted me to reconcile myself to? I was born here, almost 60 years ago. I’m not going to live another 60 years. You always told me ‘It takes time.’ It’s taken my father’s time, my mother’s time, my uncle’s time, my brothers’ and my sisters’ time. How much do you want for your progress?” He further elaborates in his essay “Front Matter,” “...we have lived through avalanches of tokens and concessions but white power remains white. And what it appears to surrender in one hand it obsessively clutches in the other” (9). Baldwin’s question to white people exposes how whiteness transcends time while Blackness does not. In this thesis, I note that queerness itself has the capacity to transcend time as it does not ascribe to the pattern of emergence within hegemonic time. Queerness is forced to exist on its own plane. As the subjects in this thesis are all white-passing, it is important to stress that race is a critical component of the queer ephemeral even though non-passing queer subjects are not the focus of this thesis. The characteristics of the queer ephemeral that this thesis defines extend further into conversations of race and sexuality that, while not directly engaged in this thesis, are still relevant and important. It is my hope that future researchers extend the notion of queer ephemerality further into these realms.

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