

Savanoma:
practice for a world always dying.

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the reclamation of national identity through embodiment, and performance by using bellydance, horror aesthetics, spiritual practices, drag and metal-music as survival strategies. Through auto-theory and auto-ethnography, *Savanoma* places artistic practice as a means of resistance to the colonial and assimilationist frameworks that Cypriot subjectivity is imagined through.

In the first part, Cypriotness is examined as a site of contingencies where the dominant narrative of Hellenization is juxtaposed against threats of contamination, to aid a Western erasure of the island's Levantine cultural inheritance. As a proposition, bellydance is thought of as a methodological tool of bodily revolt, reclaiming sensuality, queerness, and Cypriot cultururation. The second part highlights horror aesthetics, Cypriot folk and Chaos Magic practices as performance strategies. By questioning darkness as a discourse that hides within it theological and racial underpinnings, what is articulated is a rethinking of grief, fear and trauma as elements of our collective crisis. Horror then is framed as vital for confronting the unstable, violent deterioration that characterizes the present. Lastly, the third part uses black metal, drag, and queer time, as the channels to bring forth the ability of femme, queer, and camp sensibilities to tackle nationalist, heteronormative, and assimilationist agendas of control.

Overall, this project claims an anti-colonial and anti-assimilationist approach to subjectivity, proposes performance as an embodiment tool to disavow normalcy, and indicates dominant narratives of national, sexual and aesthetic dispositions as frivolous, controlling and uninspired. Ultimately imagining an alternative embodiment, that celebrates being unapologetically non-white, queer, macabre and political.

Key words: Cyprus, Metal, Bellydance, Drag, Horror, Queer, Ritual

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0. Introduction

0.1. A way in

I've constantly been asked: *What is your relationship with your audience? How do you let the Other(s) in?* This, I guess, is my answer.

I broke my heart wide open, only to find another one inside. I think of the shackles and links that join an idea to its fruition. Is methodology the way of thinking or is thinking an after effect of the methodology of doing? I thought I'd only need one more spike, of emotion, an affective plunge to inspire the drop a pen needs to make paper worthwhile. Something more than just material. The movement of the undercurrents, of a drop of a person, from the ever-flowing ocean of identity. No matter how much you distract your I, it will never run faster than the time pain needs to catch on. How does one kill time, and the world in one go? How does one choose a topic to crack open, the skull of discourse if the only way to differentiate mind from body is through decapitation?

I say more than once that the old world is dying, and we will wear its corpse. Each day I think of whether that body has finally reached the point of embalming, of keeping tempo as a drop of time, which has been slowed down so much, it's turned into a stalagmite of memory fading off into a needlepoint, ready to pierce the touch that fleets it. I think of the perfect time to set the body down, only to examine its crevices and folds, papery by drought, saggy by age. If only there would be an extra hint inside of the terminal cause. The cause that caused the shelter, which I once called a body, to turn into a soma that is shared, in need of recognition and applause. I think an autopsy is the perfect way to examine the parts which are now rotting in the sun, in full exposure for the cancerous cells to take a full embodiment. Is a lecture a performance and is the world a classroom

or is “people” still a noun that is uncountable? I’ll scream into the void and hope someone else that joins me on this journey has a thought whose bravado overshadows mine.

I chose an auto-theoretical, auto-ethnographic approach to the way I write, to present my practice and my research as self-realization, self-embodiment and self-autopsy. Cutting through my discourse with narrative, self-reflection, theory and poetic language, becomes an effort to move away from “strict” academia and sanitized forms of thought. I know it’s cliché to say you’re writing for someone; I am writing for my grandma who recently passed away. Her dream was to give as much of herself to her village, to the land, to trees, blossoming flowers, growing fruit and lastly, to the soil. The literal *now* I am writing in is back in Cyprus, on “*my*” soil.

0.2. I guess the only place to start from is a now.

You know.....

No one was looking for me.

I just happened.

I’ve been trying to write, and right, the memories of what a body like mine can push out. Staying up the whole night, yet unable to see the stars. Asking again and again if it’s true, if these red skies are really blue. I’ve been born as an oxymoron of forgetfulness. I asked my mother, the time I was born. She told me 12:30, mid-day. As a cut of an arbitrary temporal locus, I was pushed out, blood, guts, sweat, tears, fecal matter, alongside the jumble of the day opening its mouth and untying its own hands. However, I never really played outside, I never really liked sunshine in way of illumination, since it always tried to make me miss something I no longer wanted. I always thought of it as frivolous, as

condescending, making everything look brighter than they really are, making a minute feel like a mile on my skin. What am I to do with so much light, when everything that's shown is of no interest? When its intensity makes you sit and stare at our wounds forever?

Somewhere along a line, she discovered my birth certificate, reminding her that the 12:30 she had in mind was that of night. Half a unit of the witching hour, demarcating the precipice of night, the creature dance, the Gallow space of darkness, reminding those who were born now to wake up, and be driven crazy with how fast the night changes, and those who wish to sleep, to start getting ready for slumber, making them seem like they've got a lot of love to give but would rather wait for tomorrow. Now finally, my own understanding of me adds up. The only thing I like about the sunshine is that it creates a contrast of shadows, and invites mine to always follow me around, seeking my myth in solitude. What I love about the night-time is what you can get away with, hide and veil, meanings, gestures and relationships in the thick of opaqueness, being my ancestors' wildest dream. I also always loved writing during night since it felt like time only belonged to me. Those sleeping are away, busy in subconscious cardio, while the ones who have nothing to highlight during the mandated 9 to 5 or circadian normalcy Henry Ford abused, are out to play. Coagulating their blood for it now runs colder. Maybe this is why I always chose to move to cold countries. Maybe that's why I always preferred to date non-Cypriots. Because they weren't marked by the sign of the sun-drenched skin, the one that requires rays of dopamine and melanin.

I am writing this first part of my story, ironically, in a place maybe not as cold as Helsinki, but definitely in the minus. Warsaw today is sunny though. Maybe that's the medium I needed to let the creative juices spill out of, to create an auto-theoretical understanding of what my practice is. A medium that exists as a favor to a naturally cold

background. I also woke up today, feeling weirdly nostalgic about the exhaustion the temperature causes, that's shown on my phone in Helsinki, -21. Not sure if it's the Catholic masochism surrounding me, or the realization that I have cut myself from the collectivity I existed but maybe that's exactly what my practice is. A cutting up, a hyper-presence and a philosophical questioning. A recollection of circumstances that created my discourse, asking to be pushed out at a conceivably wrong time, shining, only to realize later down the line that what they long for is darkness, drenched in the tar of time, in the playfulness of a never-ending sky swallowing the concrete and thought processes I relate them to.

I see a note uttered in the after-hours, politically castrated on my phone, meant to inspire my practice. "Christianity is my existential gooning and corporeal edging is my lord". I finally have the nerve and security to open up my journal, to finally face who I was when this journey started in 2023:

It's been a month and then some more, since I've touched the sand, and wrote a score.

Of my feelings, making castles on the pages, unfolding around me.

Reading is hallucinating and writing is intoxicating.

Drunken by your spirit, with the power of affect embodied,

as the foam dissolves and your feet get cold.

Now you're sitting alone, seeing the sea break apart the surface.

I've always said, my book would be called "A Day at the Beach"

but maybe night has won.

Where things kept secret are washed ashore, and friends,

drunk, reverberate the celestial sun.

What will happen now, that there's no beach, there is no sand?

That's the question you're here to answer, so grab the key and grab a scarf,

and let out that thing you've travelled so far, to see, to find, to greet.

All while singing Goodbye Horses, as a memory, a reaction, a plea.

I was now in Finland.

When I first experienced what it feels like to be a migrant I was not in a place in my life where home was important. I was so traumatized by the closet that I wanted to leave not only that, but the entirety of “home” behind. My mum would always ask me, a few days before I'd leave, whether I wanted to take anything with me like halloumi or pastries.

I'd always say no.

There was this word through the grapevine, like an urban myth, about a Cypriot that was studying abroad, who was stopped at Heathrow airport because he tried to carry with him 15kg of meat in meatballs, kebab and various other homey foods.

I would always make fun of people like that, disregarding them by boasting that I can live for a couple of months without halloumi. Us Cypriots, we take real pride in our food culture and the way we relate to one another through it. A plate of food that we can share is the basic medium of showing our love and connecting with one another. Most of the time, it's rooted in the deep-seated trauma of the still-living war generation, like my dad,

that was uprooted and starved for years. The rest of the time, it's just people wishing to continue the basic human decency we have somehow lost within "boundaries" and other popularized therapy lingo masking the distance modern day capitalism wants to keep between us socially, just in case we start talking, sharing, organize or rally together.

Every time I'd leave, I'd say no to my mum.

Now malnourished, through a non-linear process of healing, home and the closet start seeming comfortable to me again. Evidently, not enough to return fully as I still run to the snow, but familiar enough to no longer be scary and revolting. I've realized the roots and hospitality my own being exists in at home, as an aspect of indexing my own process and wishing to carry through. When I see other Mediterranean people, I feel like our hugs are warmer. When we share food, the tastes are richer and the vegetables, their juice is just more potent.

I finally was ready to receive a mother's love through feeding myself.

Somewhere within this buffet of experience I've helped myself to, I remember all the rituals that bring me closer to those parts of home that I cherish dearly and miss, as a point of departure, as a point of arrival, spiraling into mayhem.

In a now, in the cold, in a country that considers salt as overwhelming and whose main palette consists of beige, I finally agreed to bringi just a part of home with me, to aid in the unhomeliness a tervetuloa brings with it each time.

Tea or coffee?

Both.

I bring tea to help me feel at home, at home and coffee to home me, keep me alert, when I need the outside.

The only other thing I brought with me that denotes Cyprus is a chalcedony rock a lover gifted me, while we were naked on a beach during summer. I hold it every time I want to feel the sand that touched my toes that day. I keep it with me in the altar, on stage, illuminating a foreign to the black-box concept.

How small of a particle do you need to break a concept into, for it to still be transferable and recognizable? If this rock, an archaic being that travelled from 1800's Minoan Crete to a beach in Cyprus in the 2020's, could talk about its journey of belonging, what would it say about me and its expat status in Finland? Home might be where the heart is, but your heart pumps blood in all other body parts. What about the feet? What would they say about being connected to a soil and an identity that's "national" based on mere coincidence? At which part does the body store trauma and how does it curate its archive of injury and healing? However, if embodiment is ontological and our spirits are in perfect unison, is there really a coincidence in feeling or is your neurological soup always in tune with the ebb and flow of your ancestry? Is groundedness the only thing that can take you back or is return simply the modus operandi of a hopeful hermeneutics of safety, of identity, of familiarity and of the incapacity to re-establish as a home, this place that has badly shaped rocks that do not represent you?

This is what I aim to deconstruct in this essay. An effort to stabilize the unfamiliar, contextualize the partial and highlight all the parts that can make me and my practice esoteric, performative, artistic and familiar to whoever might happen to get their hands on this paper. Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick says:

I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love. (3)

In a similarly queer way, I will analyze all the aesthetic pillars that have formed me as an artist and as a person, hailing from horror movies, performance art, metal music and homonationalist carnivals of identity politics, leading to the formation of a performing persona, a show, and ultimately this paper. I want to create a hyper-presence of a moment in time, including an archive of memory, to be reinvoked as written, as read. I want to use hermeneutics as lubricant, to get meaning with no protection and suffocate in the process, this moment in time that refuses to let us go. Somehow, fleshing out my own subjectivity through my thoughts, my work and my show. Now being nothing more than a fleeting moment in time, a pretentious all-encompassing social critique of personal nature. I want this paper to be an index of me, a self-referential archive, an orgy of metaphysics, a remuneration of subjectivity and an auto-theoretical phantasmagoria of I, killing any abstraction my subconscious might wish to perform, by performing for people.

However, when my actual body dies, please mix my ashes with rocks, mud and other pretty minerals and throw me either through a glass ceiling or at a cop. Sing for me a sin and realize that this is how you wash off the blood; by becoming the voice of the dead.

1. Grounding Cypriotness

1.1. Self-contextualizing Anti-Colonialism

The question of home and of belonging has bothered me my entire life. I've always felt too foreign for my local and too "my" local for the foreign. As I've mentioned previously, I've moved around a lot and predominantly to white countries. Now, beginning this self-reflection on my practice, it would be a disservice to both my psyche but also my actual aesthetic repertoire, to not anchor a set beginning of my subjecthood for you, the reader, to understand. Culturally, the Cypriot state I "belong" to, subjugates itself in a quasi-way to Greece based on religion, language and customs, while also Turkey under the same prerequisites, following the Turkish invasion of 1974. In addition, Cyprus is subjugated politically to Europe as an active member of the European Union while also, an Anglo-Saxonized and Westernized entity due to British colonialism - I refuse to describe it as an "ex" colony since the UK still has active military bases on the island. However, geographically Cyprus is part of the Levant, which includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Turkey.

Even on a first glance, the complexity that constitutes the Cypriot identity is evident in the different intersections it is grouped in. I would always get harassed, or discriminated for my sexuality, yet the more North I was moving throughout my life, the more racism was entering my subject. Greece, the UK, France, Netherlands, Finland. Consecutively I was being alienated by the societies I used to live in. In Greece for my accent, in the UK for my colonial familiarity yet unfamiliar culturalism, in France for my Orientalism, in the Netherlands for my "color" and in Finland for simply not being white. The reason I am contextualizing my own lived experience, before analyzing these strands of theory

that set the foundations of my research, is to disillusion whoever might read this text on certain assumptions of Cyprus as a state, but also of me as a Cypriot entity.

The “ambiguity” of whether Cyprus is a white country based on our coloniality and Europeanization needs to move beyond an “us vs them” reading of national identities and theoretical geopolitics. Instead, it needs to bed with the understanding that we are the traitors of the Swana region. We have allowed extreme violence to happen to neighboring countries, with either our help, our dismissal or even worse, our collaboration. We have been politically idle, at best, or concretely supporting any UK and US decision regarding the geopolitical turmoil of the surrounding area and currently, by proxy, Israel in their genocide of the Palestinian people. As an extension of state politics, white-washing and forced Westernization, I politically identify as a person of color regardless of whether anyone with eyes would agree with me. Parallel with these thought processes then, doing bellydance as a genderqueer individual, who was assigned male at birth, is not only a political engagement with my gender, but also with my nationality. In the following section, I will illustrate through an anti-colonial lens, the complicated locality of Cyprus, the intricate cultural remnants of a cultural identity that is in constant flux and hybridization and how bellydance, entered my life and provided a sort of “cure” to the social ailment I have been randomly conditioned into, as a (“Greek”) Cypriot (“man”).

To begin with I would like to make a distinction on refusing to use the word “postcolonialism” as a theoretical tool and instead signal-post from the get-go that my aim is “anticolonialism”. The reason for my choice is that, by risking to sound as an absolutist, I believe the only way forward from colonization, is to be against it, remove the colonial powers and their bases from colonies and provide financial reparations for the harm caused. Academically, postcolonialism is used voraciously by predominantly

colonial countries and institutions as a means to an end of a violent past. It is discussed as a ready-made answer or instrument, to analyze, undo, understand and “move on” to solving and curing their supposed “past” mission of imperialism. Parallel to that, as mentioned by Ania Loong in her text *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, postcolonialism is seen as a dying field slowly being replaced by more politically pacified fields such as “Globalization Studies”, “World Music Departments” and “World literature studies”, which as a fact is both alarming and ironic since our world has become aggressively more asymmetrical in every way, both on a global level but also on a nation-state level (1). Throughout my academic journey, I would always proclaim that postcolonialism is just not my field of interest, since I falsely felt that queerness and aesthetics could exist in a vacuum or that colonialism could be isolated from theoretical conversations of aesthetic culture and only be reserved for sociology, anthropology or political studies. Maybe it was my own inability to place my nationality on a global scale while still living in Cyprus. Maybe it was the fact that Western culture, being consumed on an island, provides the illusion that you are part of it. Regardless, the longer I was interacting with white institutions and establishments, the more evident my shortcoming was becoming to me. The more exposed I was to whiteness and westernization from a first-hand perspective, the more I saw myself as an active agent of the imperialist mission of Western (US) supremacy by isolating my thought from that of the Empire. On a discursive level, Loong claims that the events of 9/11 were the catalysts in making the conversation of “empire” newly topical and urgent while also through that moment, question globalization in its essence as having the power to shift transnational economic and cultural flows to a scale of understanding the contemporary moment as a whole (6). Based on such systemic understanding, I refrain from using any other analysis of the Cypriot locality than that of

a colony, since both my country and also my personhood have never moved away from the “post” of “colonialism”.

To this day, Cyprus is still part of the Western Empire’s financial and strategic expansion; some examples are the numerous beaches bordering the British military bases where you receive a text welcoming you to the UK once entering the area or the Ladies Mile beach where you can witness war planes, flying from the Akrotiri RAF (Royal Air Force station) towards Israel, providing them with US weapons and artillery for continuing the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Arguably, another distinction would be to separate colonialism from imperialism and neo-imperialism. The way to think of imperialism is the phenomenon of control and domination through cultural impact originating in the metropolis (in this case UK and by extension US), eventually resulting in the inflicted countries as neo-colonialism. However, imperialism can function without formal colonies (as in the US) but on the contrary, colonialism cannot (Loong 7). Ultimately, by thinking along these arguments, what I argue is the witnessing of a compound cultural-identity confusion asking for clarification. Resulting in a more than evident political placement of Cyprus at the forefront of Western supremacy’s active political expansion. A placement with a blurred transmission and confrontation of such fact, due to the white-washing of Cyprus as a discursal agent.

Cyprus throughout its short history of independence, while also its extended history of subordination has been a heavily partitioned and divided place. As an extension of that, its spatial and cultural splits have always been an obstacle to the sustenance of a stable cultural and social identity. Bahriye Kemal in her book *Writing Cyprus: Postcolonial and Partitioned literatures of place and space* writes:

Between west and east or north and south, Cyprus is a strategically located 'Mediterranean' island that has had a distinct experience of major world events. It was once a transit site for western pilgrims on route to the holy land, later an essential passageway towards conquest for western and non-western imperial regimes, more recently an overdetermined tangential area of the Arab uprising, of Islamic state action, and mass migration. The island's position between the geopolitical world divide is also reflected in its own status; Cyprus has the only divided capital in the world with the south a recognized European state inhabited mostly by people who speak Greek and identify with Christianity, and the north a de-facto entity with people who speak Turkish and are identified as Muslims. Because of this spatiality, Cyprus is simultaneously at the center and periphery of various positions that disturb fixed categorizations, thus serving to blur the dominant geopolitical binaries within the world and the island. (2)

Such an extensive polarity within the Cypriot imaginary was only aggravated by the push-and-pull of the two dominant cultural dogmas - that of Turkish and Greek superiority. However, the local diversity only provided an extra layer of dominance to the colonial powers, asking for the subjugation of Cypriots. If we think through the terms of postcolonial studies what is engaged are the layers of knowledge and representation that are inscribed onto a place through the imperialist imaginary, while also the layers produced by the colonized subjects, determining the identity of the colonizer (Kemal 5). The polarity in the case of Cyprus though, moves beyond the stable ideas of colonialism and the impact it has had on the local cultural identity. In turn it asks to be questioned

even more since its context provided a split and a hybridity that has been a pendulum of solidifying an identity, *ad nauseum*.

In a postcolonial process of transformation and invention, both colonizer and colonized carve up the borders of control. However, what complicates the process of restoration is the resistance and violation of the possibility of producing a closed, cohesive cultural space (Kemal 109). In the case of Cyprus, this occurs by the yearning to maintain a cultural historicity and national past as a now colonized entity with independence, and on the other hand, an imperialist control through Western superiority and savior-ship. During the “postcolonial” process of creating a cohesive Cypriot cultural entity, the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots separately produced a national place for themselves by splitting both the population but also the island. The wish was to construct an ethnically measurable and complete whole, carving up the “body” and “masking the spatial palimpsestic possibility of a now “free” Cyprus (Kemal 109). The binary created by the country’s split, constituted the driving force for maintaining the British “savior” while also establishing the use of the “ethnic-motherland nationalist” trope, which dominated through the ends of British colonial and into postcolonial Cyprus. The ethnic-motherland nationalist narratives launch themselves from a primordial place and relationship to the surrounding environment as “the origin”, hence utilizing the notion of the “mother” and thus the “natural”, “biological” and “original” attachment to the bigger nation (Kemal 117). Resulting in the Cypriot cultural identity resembling that of a national abortion, between two motherlands, Turkey and Greece, that never really wished to get pregnant. Such a fight for freedom ironically resulted in ushering the UK to take the role of the surrogate that ultimately wanted to keep the child for her own whims, strategies and empowerment. Before fully establishing the dynamic polarity that Cypriotness entails,

and the political implications of doing bellydance and going against our own white-washing and Westernization, an establishing of the process of Orientalization is needed.

When one seeks to understand the impacts of whitewashing, an element that cannot be omitted is that of the parallel workings of Orientalism and the seminal work by Edward Said. According to him, Orientalism derives from the proximity experienced between Britain and France and the Orient which as a “grouping” has shifted meaning throughout history based on global dynamics and colonization. Said describes that from the early nineteenth century until WWII that only meant India and the Bible lands while from World War II onwards America has dominated the Orient, resulting in its use as the Other, establishing the greater, by comparison, strength of the Occident, British, French or American (4). Such binary thinking establishes the power dynamics between the white self and the Other-of-color requiring processes of colonization, exoticization but also, refusal, negation and purification to establish the opposing identities. Thus, the first significant observation Said makes in formulating his understanding of Orientalism is that the Orient is not an objective or fixed reality, but rather an idea shaped by a distinct history, imagery, and vocabulary that functioned to construct the Orient itself as much as to define the West (5). In an overall understanding of identity, one needs the opposition to solidify and invigorate the sense of the self as the one “already” existent, hence original. Such thinking posits itself as a false-threat of contamination, trickling down historically to this day, as fuel for far-right, anti-immigration essentialist thinking. The second qualification stated by Said is that “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied” (5). This is the main reason why a brief analysis of geopolitics is essential to my argument. I do not wish to claim an other-than-white and other-than-Western subjectivity to gain points in the game of Oppression Olympics that

neoliberalism would view my identity through. I simply wish to draw upon genealogies that highlighted and elevated my thinking as political and anti-establishment. With that said and acknowledging that all national thinking is essentialist and constructed, the third qualification that Said makes is regarding the validity of such claims. “One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away” (Said 6). In accordance with Said's thinking, I believe that Orientalism is more valuable to the establishing of a European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient as a character, context or cultural reality. Orientalism is not simply a political subject matter or academic discourse that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions. Rather it is an application of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts that utilize the distinction of two unequal halves, Orient - Occident, local/neutral/pure - exotic/salacious/contaminated, civilized - uncivilized, free - subjugated, progressive - archaic and the expansion of a whole series of political interests (Said 12). Likewise, the binary opposition between Greek and Turkish elements in Cyprus may be viewed as an artificial intervention that promotes Western political interests by replicating Orientalist discursive practices on a micro level. Such practices strengthen the nationalist agendas of the opposing powers of the island with the most familiar one being the forced Hellenization of the Christian side of the island and its repulsion towards anything remotely “Oriental”. Ultimately, making permanent the rift between a population, unable to fully recuperate after its colonial past, cooperate for a collective future or unify a cultural identity.

To sum up, in the process of mapping out an artistic process and practice, what I find key is the understanding of the political substantialities that deemed such artistic concerns

as urgent and needing expression. What is art, if not the creation of a problematic and an aesthetic flirting with questioning its solutions? In this light, refusing definitions of academic “progressivism” to describe my lived experience is not only an act of self-reference to real life conditions, but also an anti-establishment process of thinking. Hence, highlighting the importance of doing “anti-colonial” work as opposed to “post-colonial” work. Additionally, bringing in discursal ties with thought genealogies that deconstruct processes of subordination, such as Edward Said’s Orientalism, sets up the perfect ground for expanding on the specific context of Cypriotness. A context that includes binaries of cultural opposition and micro-levels of Western control, ultimately leading to my own choice of artistic revolt.

1.2. De-Hellenization and Anti-Orientalism as fuel to the fire.

One of my core memories growing up in the “Greek” part of Cyprus is how much of a “threat” the Turkish element is to our cultural integrity and sovereignty. With the war generation still alive, my dad being an in-land war refugee, and with the capital being divided into two, remnants and warnings of war have always echoed within our (my) consciousness. In primary school, in the public sector, notebooks were provided with a picture of Pentadaktilos on the cover; the second biggest mountain of the island and the main symbol of the illegal Turkish occupation. The picture was accompanied with a phrase which is imbued within every “Greek” Cypriot's memory; “To not forget, and to fight”. This motto represents the refusal to “forget” what happened within our history, but also a reminder that we should be ready to protect our land from the constant threat and potential repetition of the events of 1974. In risk of sounding dismissive, I will omit a political analysis of the governmental discourse of the Cypriot state. We have had

predominantly right-wing governments hence I do not want to perform an analysis of the self-evident tendencies the right-wing performs as that would be redundant. If one still believes that dominant economic, social and political classes have any other concern within their politics but that of the ruling class, then I would rather leave them to their own devices than waste mental space in performing argumentative somersaults. What I will instead focus on, is the process of (De)Hellenicization, its use as an agent for solidifying nationalism and cultivating an “Oriental fear” while also extending the subordination and desire of forced Westernization.

To set down an initial ground, the process of De-Hellenization has been the driving force within liberation struggles of the “Greek” Cypriot population of the island. De-Hellenization was considered as any sort of potential Othering of the population based on efforts to shift the “natural” spirit of Cypriots to anything but Greek. According to Zelia Gregoriou’s analysis of the tropes used within educational frameworks to shape the Cypriot identity, De-Hellenization established an ambivalent relation between the anti-colonial resistance against British imperialism combined with Greek Cypriot Nationalism; thus sabotaging the potential trust within the two main communities of Cyprus by cultivating a nostalgic longing for a union with Greece (254). By constantly creating a sense of urgency, De-Hellenization made concrete the national risk of being “Orientalized” as the ultimate threat to our national identity, while also the ultimate goal for martyrdom and cause for sacrifice. This political threat placed Cyprus in the periphery of Hellenicism, not only geographically but also culturally as a “historical imprint of the image of the Hellenic Nation at Risk and its need for self-confirmation as essential and legitimate (Gregoriou 254). However, a key aspect of the Cypriot context that is usually omitted from our “struggle for liberation under constant threat” is the selling out of our own political landscape, to underwired powers of British colonial rule and fascist Greek

political parties wishing to expand to Cyprus through locally placed political bodies of “liberation” and “resistance”. The coup d’etat committed by this part of the population, gave the opportunity to Turkey, to properly invade the country, due to its internal turmoil. In short, the counter-hegemonic ideologies which fueled the anti-colonial effort, have now been redeployed by state nationalism in the post-Independence era (Gregoriou 243). In this way, creating a ripple effect of the same “threats” the Cypriot identity was facing during colonial rule, reaching up to the current moment.

The first question posed within unpacking the split between the two pre-dominant Cypriot communities is, how does a postcolonial society rewrite, deconstruct and remember its colonial past? The main reverberation of discourse is that colonialism, as aforementioned, is not just external but also internalized since the internal colonialisms, left within the rumbles of western imperialism are essential to its continuity (Gregoriou 242). From this footing, what was needed for UK imperialism to progress in the now independent Cyprus was an anxiety inducing infliction within the island’s nationalism. Hybridity and the “threat” to the Cypriot genus was solidified through the post-Independence fascination with roots and ancestral purity, as juxtaposed with the mockery for otherness, in this case the Turkish thus Oriental element of the island. Resulting in “the colonial “Othering” of Cypriots as a “hybrid genus”, and the resistance to colonial usurpations of educational control by tainting every cultural contact under or through colonial rule as de-Hellenization” (Gregoriou 241). Such threats were not only transmitted and transplanted within younger generations through the educational system, but also through folk culture in the everyday, starting from Cypriot/Turkish coffee, leading to my argument about Oryantal Dans/Tsifteteli.

National memory and nationalism reproduced itself mostly throughout the educational system, aiming at sealing the Cypriot identity shut, containing only Greekness. By holding a didactic approach to memorization, the anti-colonial struggle and fight for liberation have been contained in a singular Event which is in need of constant repetition for preservation through memory, school culture and fanaticism against the atrocity committed to our “pure” nation. However, this repetition implies the exclusive singularity of how the Event is and should be remembered as, since it needs to oppose alternative angles for its continuation (Gregoriou 243). An example is the numerous cases of word-of-mouth of violation, sexual violence and the insidiousness “the volatile Turkish” man has committed to the unaware “Cypriot” woman. As Stavros Karayiannis describes:

Certain narratives that strengthened stereotypes became the subject of popular folklore that served as undeniable reminders of Turkish penetration into Greek honor. For example, a Greek woman’s rape by a Turkish commander was a recurring narrative. Seen as a form of conquest, rape marks itself on the individual woman’s body but also on the body of the nation as a whole, marking with scars that do not heal either on the individual body or on the nation (15).

This mythopoesis of penetration and contamination, has been witnessed first-hand by more-or-less any Cypriot you ask. While in the army, we were narrated this violent encounter of the “Black” Turks invading a village and pushing themselves on the “Greek” women. When I asked our commander to shed some light on the murders of Turkish-which Cypriot Muslims Greek-Cypriot Christians were committing before the invasion, I was put in prison for 2 weeks. This is one of many examples of how the Turkish

invasion, functioning as “The Event” concretizes the Hellenic national pride and trauma. Such solidification resists the ambiguity of questioning the victim-perpetrator relationship and thus becomes sacralized and in need of retribution. The educational models of Cypriotness constitute its singular repetition and exclusive memorization as worship rather than learning, ritual rather than investigation (Gregoriou 243). In short, in the effort to create a concrete identity, nationalism and the lack of acknowledging the multidimensionality of the Cypriot cultural background, created a mono-dimensional identity fueled with national hysteria and constant insecurity. Ultimately, having nationalism endlessly reproduce itself through the sacralization of Hellenicism, by using memories of contamination and never-retributed trauma paralleled to treating any sort of “hybridization” of Cypriotness as dangerous. Lastly, with the denial of any recognition of ethnic similarities, nationalist narratives fuel both sides of the divide with the Other’s contaminative forces.

As an illegal state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a reality. There is nothing that could be done, neither intellectually, nor theoretically, that can reverse the effects of the invasion. My efforts are not to nullify and minimize the illegality of the state and the violence that its creation was built on. What I am aiming for is an analysis of self-directive cultural narration. There is a fear that accommodates any recognition of multiculturalism in Cyprus since that is solidified as dangerous, with any alternative narrative but that of villainizing Turkish people as treacherous. Any mention of communality is seen as enhancing the “Other's campaign for political recognition and thus jeopardizes “our” own political advantage” (Gregoriou 245). Hence, any mention of multiculturalism or at least, expansion of modern day Cypriotness is de-facto linked to it existing in the vacuum of Europeanization or Westernization. It is addressed as an inescapable effect of global socio-economic change and globalized political temperament

rather than as a wished question urging the re-appropriation and re-thinking of our historical ethnic diversity and ethnic divides (Gregoriou 245). A rethinking which could lead to a communal, empathetic, richer and truly Cypriot whole that does not need an ethnic affix to excuse its existence. Unfortunately, though, the reality of the situation recreates a colonial sort of hermeneutics, leading back to imperialist thinking, Orientalism and simply, subordination to a “higher power” that will provide our own; be it Greek, Turkish, European, British, or Western.

To claim that I may speak of colonial textuality outside my colonial condition or that the anti-colonial struggle can be narrated outside of colonial power dynamics, is nothing but a fallacy. Even the fact that I am using the colonizers language to contextualize my culture, is validating my previous point of colonial hermeneutics. However, the aim of recontextualizing my own “nationalism” instead of my Turkish speaking counterparts, is to remove the unavoidable racist and violent projections which come when speaking on a reality which you simply do not know. In accordance with anti-colonial wishes, I’ve consciously avoided “postcolonial” critiques as those can be theoretically depthless and “paradoxically burden the postcolonial subject with the responsibility of going native when narrating their colonial pasts for international audiences, demanding authenticity and contextual excess where abstraction would suffice for Western authors” (Gregoriou 246). Lastly, by opposing the colonial fantasy of hybridity, I wish to propose a recovery and re-narrativizing of what Cypriotness can be, instead of a historical remembering of both accounts of the divide. Thus, hoping to have illuminated that the need for recontextualizing the Cypriot narrative is due to the historical impoverishment and unequal distribution of narrative authority that colonial rule has left, as an imprint of their uninspired ways of domination and control, on the island’s history, trauma and self-realization. Ultimately asking: Can there be a common ground for a

Cypriot embodiment? Can we translate the national narrative to recognizing counter-hegemonic structures? Can that translation also recognize its racist and nationalist shortcomings? Can there be a cultural outlet, to aggravate both sides of the divide to a revolution or at least, political re-appropriation?

1.3. Bellydance as a space of bodily opposition.

The first time I encountered bellydance in an impactful way, was at a psychedelic festival in Hungary. Fresh out the closet, I was drenched in a maelstrom of thoughts, insecurities and questions relating to my situation and my relationship to the world around me. Since the dance floor is always political, I ended up connecting with a woman who had provided my mind the portal needed to fully resonate with its newly-exhibited queer nature. I saw a woman on stage bellydance to aggressive trance music, in a way that I haven't seen before. The dance was not soft nor seductive in the traditional way. Instead, it was cleansing, healing, restorative, dense. Somewhere within the crowd, fueled by internalized homophobia and the music of Kaya Project, I lost myself within the beats and the shimmys and unconsciously, I was bellydancing as my friend had described to me later.

With the festival ending, I had returned to Cyprus and decided to start bellydance classes as a pass-time to see what these movements ask of my body. It wasn't until later that I noticed how angry and shocked my dancing made people around me, where I really grasped the power that encounter has had on me. Parallel to the political implications this dance would have had on my subjectivity, bellydance had proved to be a site of continuous contingencies on how I would think of myself as a Cypriot, as a "male" but also, as an artist. To understand the movement lineage of Cyprus, what is crucial is remembering its culture pre-colonialism. In order to empower the argument of my own

stylistic choices, I will be thinking alongside Stavros Karayiannis and his book *Dancing Fear & Desire: Race, Sexuality & Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*. To claim parthenogenesis on the links between Cypriot anti-colonialism and bellydance would be delusional. Hence, I pay my respect and due to the academic fervor that this book has flamed within me.

Before British rule, Cyprus was a part of the Ottoman Empire - a fact that was retained and utilized later, as mentioned previously in this paper, for the subjugation of the Cypriot population. However, the Ottoman culture was “spectacularly sexual” and adopted embodied practices which would be described by the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie of the time as lascivious and immoral. According to Stavros Karayiannis, “apart from Islam, then, Greek myth and ubiquitous archaeological evidence associated the island with Aphrodite’s cult, the dissolute and wanton goddess whose worship turned people into sensual and sexually excessive subjects. Moreover, because dark skin had already become a prime signifier of a subaltern and promiscuous race, the island’s population fulfilled the requirements for a racialized erotic and exotic model under the British gaze” (11). As a result, British colonialism had exported violence and homophobia through its legislation, as they did with most of their colonies. In 1885, the British legislation on sodomy, constituted homosexuality as illegal and acts of indecency as misdemeanors, establishing their native catholic puritanism as a forced norm (Karayiannis 11). Such establishing not only aggravated the internal turbulence of Cypriot society but also consolidated the material history of Cypriot subjectivity. In short what this meant is a dismissal of any sexual behavior Cypriots had before colonial rule as pernicious and a forced sterilization and compliance to Western constructs of exclusive heterosexuality. Additionally, such legislative turn did not only affect the sexual behaviors of people but by extension their performance of gender, movement and any sort of “non-normative”

manifestations of them (Karayiannis 11). Ultimately, establishing the Cypriot masculine “ideal” and its “acceptable” behaviors as the only choice.

In the body of Western supremacy, Greece and Greekness is placed within its periphery to attain the lineage of democracy, philosophy and the Greek archaic culture as its own. In this light, only a certain construction of Greece had been agreed upon by Western European epistemologies to represent the origins of European civilization (Karayiannis 11). It is based on these agreements and understandings that the Western rule has given Cypriots “a way in” ethnically, socially and financially through the scheme of imperialism. Additionally, this cultural “progress” was promised to reappropriate and re-strengthen Cypriot manhood through the armed resistance and rejuvenate its spirit from the years of Ottoman oppression, and colonial subjugation (Karayiannis 14). As the threats of De-Hellenization echoed across the Cypriot imaginary, the bounds of what was deemed as acceptable for Greek Cypriots was juxtaposed against the lascivious Turkish elements of their “past”.

The “movements” which were allowed after the intercommunal fighting included a rethinking and a wished Westernization and Re-Hellenization. “The socially appropriate posture and performance of gender and sexuality, as well as the reflection of these in cultural traditions, included dance with the most crucial part in these performances being race and sexuality” (Karayiannis 15). Greekness then provided a “pure”, “Western” and “white” passage for Cypriot identity. Opposed, Turkish Cypriots were allegedly dark and ugly people, devoid of grace and physical charm (Karayiannis 15). The irony of such racist stereotyping within the Greek-Cypriot imaginary, is only made even more ridiculous if one is to ever lay eyes upon a Greek-Cypriot - let alone when compared with a Central, Western or Northern European. Leaving biological and

ethnic determinism behind, the yearning for creating a dirty, dark and ugly performance persona of my own “Greek” Cypriot “male” body, has been contextualized through such contingencies and wished ridiculing of them. By with-holding the metal and horror strings of my analysis for later, bellydance thus is the tool of embodiment I have used to critique the internal rifts of my Cypriotness.

Initially, I would like to make the distinction of mentioning bellydance as such, instead of any of its other terminologies. By writing it in English, I attempt to reinstate and relate to it as an imperial language while also refusing to invoke the “foreignness” of the term by constantly italicizing it and elevating it into a passive exoticization that non-English terminology might cause. Additionally, I succumb and admit to the colonial project that this paper is, functioning under a white institution and destined to be read by a majority of white people; including examiners, professors, students and whichever future LAPS student will join based on the new policies applied by the Finnish government (of this moment) and the Uniarts study fees for non-EU students. I will not talk to you in a language you do not understand, nor will I exhibit my own “foreignness” in a way that is always left somewhere “there” to the “here” which you are reading through.

To begin with, the word itself resembles the contingencies found within similar colonial cultural projects. Based on related dance idioms with wide variations, the terminology expands from bellydance, danse du ventre, Middle Eastern dance, Oriental dance and Tsifteteli with each having their own geographical specificity and their own political problems of substantiation (Karayiannis 25). Mainly, the understanding of bellydance within a Western mind, stems from French colonialism of Algeria and Tunisia and its absorption into a male heterosexist discourse. As Karayainnis states, “it is redolent

with imperial soldiers' heterosexual pursuit of hedonist fulfillment on colonized subjects' bodies" (25). In this way, fulfilling an Orientalist and exoticizing undertaking of the artform within a colonial gaze. On the other hand, the English term derives from a translation from the Arabic Raqs Sharqi ("Dance of the East"), which in the Arab world indicated Egypt and its specific variation of the dance form; this designation may result from an Arabic adoption of the European identification as the dance was widely represented in cafes that were frequented by Westerners who referred to it as such (Karayiannis 26). Hence bellydance in its popular sense, even as terminology, represents within it a Western understanding of foreign cultural expressions needing imperialist definitions for their transmission. The lineage of bellydance's transmission within Europe is a rich and dense history of appropriation; one which I will leave widely unexamined, in favor of a less-historical account of how this dance form has affected my specific Cypriot national profile and artistic expression.

My first "real" encounter with the anti-colonial attributes of bellydance happened once I started dancing and performing in white contexts. In Cyprus, our version of bellydance, tsifteteli, is a quite popular movement idiom, which even if exclusively reserved for women, is still within the popular imagination. By "Re-Orientalizing" the movements and keeping a more traditional to the Egyptian form, I unpacked a sort of reappropriation of what my own body could be both as a Cypriot but also as a genderqueer individual. According to Karayiannis, most efforts to recuperate modern bellydance relied on reconstructing the genre through remnants of women's fertility rites associated with primeval goddess worship; regardless of whether such convictions might have been regarded with mistrust within feminism, the performance of the dance itself can and is for many people, and especially women of color a valuable service to their liberation (Karayiannis 71). Considering the "Westernization" of Cyprus through colonialism, the

generational cultural dogma of hating anything remotely Oriental kept the hips, shoulder and lumbar region in a controlled form, signaling a state of embarrassed silence and purity. In opposition, Oriental Dance uses these body parts enunciating a fluid, carnal sensuality and desire that is celebratory not only of “plethoric” body shapes and body parts, but also, exhibits them as tantalizing even to the uninitiated, unaccustomed, and undiscerning European eye. (Karayiannis 73). In the same vein, I’ve always felt alienated and completely shunned by the dogmatization of bellydance and its appropriation in classrooms, dance schools and rethinking through strict technique. I will never be skinny, feminine or “small” enough to enter “The Dance World”, nor even its crevices that derive from my own cultural reality. Similar to the strictness of ballet, this danceform has been appropriated by whiteness to a Form. Stemming from collective celebration and openness of expression to a vehicle of the colonial and patriarchal gaze. Regardless, the induction of its repertoire within my own movement, has provided a way to refamiliarize with my own ancestry and cultural specificity, parallel to simply pissing off any macho man witnessing my performances, and any homonationalist wishing for Hellenic and Western assimilation.

If one is to question further the political implications bellydance might have to a patriarchal spectatorship, what needs to be repeated is the implementation of an unrelenting Greek Cypriot nationalism that seals its identity to an anxiety driven by anything threatening to the dogmatization of Greekness. Dance with its kinesthetic motion and its possibilities of redefining and challenging acceptable postures, destabilizes the embodied norm while also subverts the masculine Cypriot body (Karayiannis 9). Through its redefinition of presence, bellydance reconfigures movement as sexual, desirable and posturally fluid as opposed to rigid, pure, controlled and masculine. Oriental Dance in the Western colonial male gaze, epitomized the inherent sexualizing that was

deemed innate in Eastern culture, asking no other relationship but that of control, detachment and distance. According to Karayiannis, the abundance of the dance form seemed fluid and evasive since frequently, the spectators felt themselves hovering within that space of imperial virtue and surrendering to the semiotics of dance, which in this case invoked the yearning for the dancer's body through sexual desire (74). Thus, the omitting of male bellydancers comes not as a surprise, but as a testament to the hysteria surrounding homosexuality and sodomy within Western rule. If female bellydancers go against Western moral integrity by provoking voyeurism, then the assertance of male bellydancers as valid, would reveal nothing but a confrontation with an awkward and unexamined desire. By recognizing the male dancer as an extension of sexual embodiment, what is also recognized is him as a receptive sexual agent of Western desire, hence a re-presenting of a "masculinized West penetrating a male Orient" (Karayiannis 97). In this analogy, the use of bellydance within my own performative body constitutes not only a clear choice to re-nationalize my Cypriotness and confront it with an inescapable and intrinsic "Orientalization" but also, a re-claiming of a genderfluid sexuality through dance, exposing a desire that has been lost within dogmas of purity, religious puritanism and colonial rule. As descendants from the "Island of Aphrodite", the least we can do is use our pelvic floors for something sexier than simply bending over to a colonizer and European domination.

1.4. Not Greek as in white but Cypriot as in f*ck you.

To reinstate my choices, I witness an unfolding of colonial history in the way it is lived, breathed and moved through the body. The British colonial occupation of Cyprus has been left without closure, for the Western Empire to have a pawn in the geopolitical chess played over world domination and resources. By instilling ideas of national purification,

British colonialism has created a rift within the Cypriot population with hyperventilating the process of Hellenization, opposed to Turkish contamination. Through a micro-level of Orientalization, a racial anxiety was created within the nationalist population of Cyprus for the purity our Greekness comes with, to prosper and infest our minds with self-serving narratives. Moving beyond abstraction, the regulating of the Cypriot imaginary is lived through memory and thought processes while embodied through dance, sexuality and the performance of gender. Cyprus thus has been deployed by whiteness as relevant to it, yet never fully admitted within its shelter, resulting in a cultural identity that is always in crisis.

I choose cultural confrontation and anti-colonialism as opposed to the limits “post” colonialism brings with it; an academic fever dream of modern -isms and pacified ideologies that are left inaccessible, stuck within departments ivory towers.

Remember: to reconcile with a forced reality, either of hybridity or of naturalization, is nothing more but a reproduction of domination and white supremacy.

Remember: what is needed is a redistribution of power, a demand for reparations and a removal of military bases.

Remember: in a hyper-nationalist farfalle, Cypriotness is dictated as Hellenic, masculine, rigid, and heterosexual, inescapably reminded of its trauma, through the educational system, the way we take up and move through national space, but also relate to one another as Cypriots with no needed affix.

Maybe, bellydance then becomes an “other” methodology, an “other” archive of what our cultural identity includes beyond that which colonial thought tried to dictate.

Bellydance can be knowledge through the pelvis, erasing rigid puritanism with its gyrating moves, fleshy shimmies and excessive sensuality.

My genderqueer, AMAB bellydancing body, hides within its crevices and folds, a national critique that can and will not be pulverized into homonationalism, assimilated within a constipated and adopted cultural heritage nor be given enough pronouns to enter the “progressive Europe” trope my forced victimhood falsely perceives as savior-ship.

Ultimately asking: What form can Cypriotness take if left to its own, its uniquely and sincerely own, devices? If the body were to store trauma, how could healing, rewriting, repoliticizing be felt as if felt through the hips? Can Orientalizing be seen as a weapon instead of a colonial outpost of thought? Can our own pathologies be used to contaminate the people of no-color?

To finish with a question is like screaming at the sea and waiting for it to respond. Instead, I will finish with a plea:

Be more embodied and more touchy with our affect in politics. Refuse any sort of palatable reading of our own textuality. Be irreverent towards academic neutrality. Defy the expectations of how pleasure is felt. Be anti-assimilationist, anti-colonial, anti-heteronormative and take back the way we celebrate: in the streets, shaking together all the bodies the Empire hates.

2. Grounding horror: chaos and folk magic as performance strategy.

2.1. Why horror and why now?

My initiation in performance was through the nightlife circuit and the queer landscape of clubbing. It was always saturated with colorful lights, pulsating music and sequined fabric. However, somewhere within the turn of becoming a “performance artist” instead of just someone that performs, I reminded myself of that teenage boy I used to be. After moving back to Cyprus from Amsterdam, I experienced the most depressing period of my life, as people close to me were passing on, from various causes. Somewhere within eulogies, grievances and black clothes, I closed myself home and could do nothing more but consume culture that I had forgotten. No matter how much I hate streaming platforms, the turn happened while watching *Wednesday*. I heard the *Goo Goo Muck* by The Cramps, saw Jenna Ortega dancing in black taffeta and lace and somehow remembered that *that* is music. I suddenly remembered that my teenage boy wasn't “queer” in the Westernized, Instagrammable, Berlin-techno, RuPaul’sDragRaceized way, queerness is being marketed as. I hated color because I felt it somehow exposed me and pop music felt like contamination to my taste buds. *He* was a chubby, stoner metalhead that hated the system, reveled in darkness and recognized why riffs, solos and bloody scenes are the best tool to combat normativity as they represent a visceral internal that most people are too scared to face.

If gayness is a rainbow, then queerness should be a pirate flag. That moment marked the beginning of a process, which in my psychic understanding is being concluded with the writing of this thesis. A reminder of my “dark” past sparked a rejoice in horror

aesthetics and movies, a rediscovery of esotericism on a more local level and a romantic understanding of the tensions required, to unveil my inner limits as exhibited through performance. Ultimately being led to an alternative lineage of performance making, that is at once visceral, liminal, unapologetically confrontational yet romantic in its own grievance.

Aiming to contextualize the aesthetics I place myself in, I want to question the essence of what horror is, primarily through cinema and think parallel to my esoteric practice and influences. Anna Bogutskaya, in her book *Feeding the Monster: Why Horror has a Hold on Us*, claims that horror cinema provides a visual to our collective nightmares by challenging us in facing our fears, hungers and anxieties we're attached to (6). Horror is usually viewed as a reactionary choice, a sort of tell-off to whoever is on the receiving end of a fan's adoration. If one is to move beyond the potential dismissive eye-rolls accompanied with a goth, a metalhead, a "dark" person entering the room, the most frequent question asked around a horror fan's obsession is "Why?". The lack of understanding of such fascination with the macabre, pathologizes the appeal of the frightening, and delineates that the person enjoying such "horror" is in fact, the problem (Bogutskaya 11). Essentially meaning, there must be something broken inside you to enjoy such "perverse" visuals, or there needs to be a justifiable well-meaning answer to the reasoning. At the end of the day, who likes being sad and angry all the time?

On the contrary and in the risk of seemingly "excusing" my aesthetic choices, horror has always constituted a safe space for me both as a queer but also as a metalhead. Queer people are villainized regardless of whether their aesthetics are dark, or not, since the only way of acceptance is assimilation. Growing up in the closet, most queer people are experiencing feelings that horror usually fleshes out: pain, anxiety, paranoia, persecution,

stress, violence. I am not saying that through horror, one is desensitized to such adversities, but instead we are re-sensitized to understanding situations and maybe even reclaiming their status and the psychological state of the “villain”. According to Bogutskaya, horror more than any other genre, is a genre of empathy since it is not prescribed in simple voyeurism, especially in this mediated age of information, but more so it is about recreating a feeling of what the protagonists are feeling (10). By recreating such scenarios, horror provides a space where we can converse about such feelings, give them dimensions and ultimately conquer. As she says, horror keeps us safe (Bogutskaya 10). Funny enough, I would always say that by watching horror I feel the safest, because I have control of my expectations - something “bad” will always happen or the least, I’ll see a “cool” turn of plot that’ll keep me hooked. It provides a physical response to storytelling through revulsion, reaction and looking away. Horror, asks for a genuine sincerity of disposition from the audience, as there is nothing “ironic” in being scared and thus, at best, is an experience of extreme physical and emotional earnestness through empathy and understanding (Bogutskaya 16). Ultimately, what horror could provide is a sincere confrontation with the world around us and the conditions most people are living through. Arguably, providing an embodiment of omitted affects and of emotional eloquence. However, the perception of horror fans and the genre at large exist within a general cultural pattern of demonizing darkness and the macabre, a fact that represents our culture’s dismissal of not only its interiority but also its essence which is to a big extent riddled with social violence.

Now, there are numerous crises happening worldwide, and a complete submersion in transmitting, corroding, reshaping and rehashing information about how each and every one of these crises is in direct confrontation with our everyday life and choices. In times of social crises, there is an increase in horror movies, dark aesthetics and macabre

sensibilities. Fear exists between what we see before us and what we remember as we recall the moment of terror at a later stage, exaggerating its intensity through memory (Bogutskaya 25). Which one of us has not dreadfully remembered their drunken antics of the night before, causing shame? Who has not replayed a scenario with a lover, a quarrel, over and over again in their memory, trying to make sense of each choice and each utterance, designed to hurt one another?

Fear and negative affect are inscribed within the way we conduct ourselves and our behaviors because of memory - making the intensity of situations stronger than they were. According to studies of memory science, fear is amongst the most popular research topics, indicating that we remember scary events from our past more clearly because they activate the amygdala of our brains into an aroused state, causing the intense reactions of horror and leading to the stronger creation of memories, in this case being that of fear (Bogutskaya 25). Through horror as a genre though, what is created is a sort of tracing of our fears as a collective consciousness. The urban legend of cinema crowds walking out during the first screening of *Psycho* still echoes to this day amongst the horror fanatics¹. Through the lineage of horror, we can see a sort of social reflection within our fears, and the cinematic representations haunting our dreams. Bogutskaya summarizes it perfectly through the last decades - "the vampire overload of the 80's with their overt queerness, can be seen as an obvious reaction to the AIDS crisis, as well as the blood-sucking behavior of bankers, similarly, the torture porn trend of the 2000's, with its grainy, green-yellow visuals and CCTV aesthetics, recalled the footage of soldiers torturing political

¹https://www.reddit.com/r/Hitchcock/comments/1o8khfw/i_love_these_newsreels_showing_the_audiences/
https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/1vb9os/audience_reactions_to_the_shower_scene_in_psycho/

prisoners” (37). However, expanding beyond that, institutions are shown haunted and failing, political and economic structures collapse through zombie apocalypses, family dynamics are tattered with sex, desire and deceit and cannibalism and the war, destruction and death we consume daily on our phone screens, inform the “monsters” we consume on the big screen. Arbitrary to the influx of horror in our present, if one is to pin-point a singular monster of the now, who would step on the pedestal of having the most nightmarish disposition? Would it be a state, a governance, a politician, a familiar to us person or a monster archetype?

Once starting the process of this research, I faced a dead-end. I had to ask myself what I *really* wanted to talk about. The pool was large and my interest was ambivalent - queerness, metal, darkness, anti-colonialism, esotericism, sex, war, death. Instead, I realized that I simply could not choose. I could not delineate which topic of our modern ailment is more “important” the other. As a horror fanatic, I made a pact with myself to watch a movie a day, to somehow figure out how I want to go about exposing my inert darkness. What I realized is that there is no individual cause which I can give myself to. If the world is experienced now as a never-ending whirlpool of information, trauma and “breaking news”, how can I even choose one sentence over the other? If our “monsters” reflect our society, what are we *really* afraid of now? The zombies are now us, waiting in line to eat from a fast-food chain that supports genocide. The witches are ordering magic candles from Temu and the cannibals are now wearing suits, sitting in white houses, showing up to summits on a bike and taking part in triathlons. Our horrors do not have a defining monster as most of our fears have turned into realities that we are being bombarded with, one after another (Bogutskaya 42). The stuff of nightmares now does not have to be researched extensively and made resonant with allegories, symbolisms and personifications. One simply needs to log online. Modern horror is predominantly

concerned with looking inwards to psychological planes, generational issues and traumatic experiences that transcend a clear correlation with an external singularity (Bogutskaya 57). This, however, raises a new difficulty in association of what it is that really *does* cause horror. Through negative affects, horror now posits a difficulty in unpacking not only a single narrative needing combat, but a single cause to the effects it causes (Bogutskaya 44). Ultimately unveiling that what is being transmitted right now socially, as signals of desperation is not a reaction to a boogeyman, but an understanding of everything, everywhere, all at once.

As a population of thinkers, we are forced into realizing that the world is permanently unfixable through our own experience. Our own vast, emotional plane represents that of the outside, since it is dark, subconscious and ever-present. There is no vampire, there is no werewolf, there is no monster from the black lagoon. Ultimately, providing the foregrounding of a kind of thinking that translates into our everyday lives, as structures of opposition. Good vs Bad, Dark vs Light, Internal Vs External, blurring the lines between perception and protection as being in constant threat. Moving beyond filmic interpretations then, such structures are embedded within common consciousness through religious and social strata of understanding difference. Ultimately, providing a potential foregrounding not only of trauma relations but also, of racial dimensions of the way we experience darkness and negative affects.

2.2. Reframing darkness as a theological underfooting.

Bringing it to “real-life” and moving beyond filmic understandings of horror and the macabre, trauma is the key to sparking fear-reactionary tales. If we continue our analogy that trauma and fear are linked with memory and its strength due to our affective response

of “reliving” the past, then trauma and nostalgia go hand in hand as deep remembrance of that said past. Nostalgia was described as a neurological disease of essentially a demonic cause by a medical student in Switzerland in 1688 who coined it as such and has since been mostly associated with immigrants as a form of melancholia (Bogutskaya 60). Additionally, with a strong remembrance of better times that have passed, nostalgia denotes a soothing memory, serving as a pacifying reminder, warding off loneliness, and feeling out of place. However, deriving from the Greek word, nostos (homecoming) and algos (pain), nostalgia also implies a deep sense of loss and lack (Bogutskaya 60). As an arch-way I would like to re-examine a psychic understanding of “a” past and “my” past, to potentially unveil how the dismissal of horror is engraved within religious structures that also have a racial under-footing as opposition and difference stop being reactions to a “provocative” stimuli and start becoming lived experience.

The polarity of light and dark aesthetics has been a recurring theme not only in horror discourse as far as placing who is the hero and the villain, but more so, as translating to a wider realization of social dynamics and spiritual influences. Andrew Prevot in *Divine Opacity: Mystical Theology, Black Theology, and the Problem of Light-Dark Aesthetics* argues that the polarization of light and dark, pervades Christian spirituality and theological imagination through its crudest understanding being that of light symbolizing wisdom, goodness, purity, power and everything holy, opposed to darkness symbolizing every corresponding antithesis, ignorance, evil, ugliness, impurity, weakness and evil (166). Such binary thinking is not foreign to the way we experience our social selves and realities, since there is always an Other to claim distance from. In a formal dialectic, the light/dark dichotomy trickles down in ontological terms as a dualism of light constituting being, and darkness constituting nothingness, the lack of being, the lack of “holiness” (Prevot 166). If one is to follow this analogy within the history of the Western world, it

comes as no surprise that racialized bodies while also darker aesthetics have been constituted as inferior to its lighter counterparts, and arguably Christian and “virtuous” opposition.

This divisive symbolism, creates yet another hierarchy that can be viewed as racialized - making white and Christian supremacy nothing more but a continuation of this symbolism at large. This aesthetics, form conscious and subconscious categories of bodily perception, spiritual bodies of power while also political and cultural institutions, as predicated on such categories, ultimately endorsing and reasoning violent exploitations and vilifications of their counterparts; black/brown racism, anti-Muslim hatred and even a cultural exploitation of Satanic panic. In contrast though, if one is to examine further alternative lineages of the Christian imaginary, darkness not only proves to be the opposite of what is assumed by our racist imaginary, but also an indispensable part of esoteric culture. According to Dionysian mystical theology, darkness is a lofty divine name that in certain respects deserves to be ranked higher than lightness as it has the power to retrieve mystical resources and inert power that remains hidden and unconscious (Prevot 168). With the appraisal of darkness as a vital component in spirituality, what this recommendation could suggest is a subversion of the hierarchized light-dark aesthetics our beliefs are based on, stemming from Christian scripture and tradition, thus, leading to a potentially anti-racist belief system. Ultimately, highlighting the importance of including dark aesthetics within our common psyche as already present but also, by enriching the language we have of defining our psyches and potentially, providing an easier access to collective healing.

To streamline the importance of darkness within conversations of decolonizing spirituality, there needs to be a direct parallelization and explanation between ideas of

spiritual darkness as distinguished between the darkness of God in mysticism and Black theology, as a spiritual dimension of the Black liberatory movement. Within esotericism and mysticism, the darkness of God is associated with an unknowing and purgative suffering - it is relevant yet not synonymous with the blackness of God, as experienced within black religion and spirituality; simply put, dark does not equal black, and vice versa (Prevot 169). Proceeding from such clarification, what is essential is to realize the limitation of considering both dimensions of spirituality, as negation. If one is to affirm either dimension as intelligible only through absence, then what is performed is a solipsistic understanding of both spirituality, but also of darker aesthetics at large. Whether this is on the one hand, through apophasis and ascesis condemning a lack of knowledge and of wisdom or on the other, of justice as opposed to oppression and racism, the conception of darkness as negation is harmful to both understandings' rich core (Prevot 169). By reducing the understanding of darkness to that of negation, what is solidified is the assumption that darkness and nothingness mean deficiency and lack. This sort of understanding is intensified when one examines the history of religion in Europe and of "Modern" Christianity at large.

To begin with, Enlightenment needed blackness as its supposed antithesis, to expand the white imaginary alongside its colonial outposts and territories worldwide. In this way strengthening the fantasized glory and purity of Europe and thus whiteness, as reproducing itself against the terrifying darkness of the primal other, Africa (Prevot 171). By juxtaposing the lightness of white skin, Western culture has not only vilified Black people and has deemed their own spiritual practices as "dark" but also, has completely erased darkness from the spiritual equation that would otherwise, dictate an esoteric whole. Ultimately felicitating the point that Black life and segregation and the eliminating

of darker aesthetics, is not only a social result of white supremacy, but also, a racist underpinning of Western and Christian spiritual dominance.

In an effort to resist the logic behind white supremacy and racist spirituality, I invoke this analysis of mysticism and blackness, not to sanctify and spiritualize the suffering of Black people, but more so, to expand the conversation to other routes of psychic understanding. By expanding the radius of spirituality, I wish to elaborate further on how my own personal esoteric practice, can be informed both by Western esotericism and its performative gestures, but also an erased past of Cypriot spirituality that was far from the Christian, indoctrination I was raised through.

2.3. Reclaiming Cypriot spirituality: Aphrodite cults.

As aforementioned in Chapter 1, Cypriotness at large remains an unexamined field of contingencies, both geopolitical and cultural but also , as a result, spiritual. It is easy to conclude processes and characterize them through terminologies that stem from social thinking, like colonialism and appropriation. However, how would our understanding of self, change if one is to expand the line of questioning anti-colonialism comes with, to spiritual matters? If one is to investigate the roots of indoctrination, then potentially Christianity and its binary thinking of darkness/light result to more sites of contingency for creating a unified Cypriot identity by erasing the “darker” or at least more ritualistic past, of Cypriot spirituality. My aim is to deconstruct the opaqueness of Cypriot spiritualism that comes with Christianity and unveil the sacred ancestral esotericism that is closer to my own thinking and spiritual practice. Pre-Hellenization and Christianity, the Aphrodite Cults of the island, and its general history of the sacred, proves to be a space of erotic liminality and alternative embodiment of a history that has been erased.

Ultimately, functioning on a personal level as a move beyond esotericism, and a fueling to my own artistic practice and performance language.

It's commonly known that Cyprus has, as an emblem of its historicity and identity formation, the fact that it was the birthplace of Aphrodite - sprouting tourist attractions, guided tours and curated festivals based around this association. However, the goddess worshiped and shaped as Aphrodite, spans further than the historical and cultural Hellenic depiction of who we think of, when the goddess is invoked. Before she was shaped as the Olympian who ruled love and beauty, the goddess worshiped on the island, inhabited a cruciform shape that was carved in limestone and clay, placed in tombs and settlements, meant to protect vegetation and copper. As mentioned in the archaeological grassroots archive, Earthstoriez, the goddess worshipped was "an ancient divinity with origins linked to the worship of the powers of life; a goddess of fertility who was worshiped on the island since the Iron Age, and whom the Cypriots presumably did not at that time call Aphrodite." (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). Found next to her sanctuaries and worshipping sites were workshops for smelting copper, further facilitating the root of the name of the island Kypros, later, becoming the name of the then goddess "Kypris". In accordance with the past of the island, copper proves to be a melding point of cultural continuity, but also the material condition that paves the way of spiritual alignment and narratives. Arguably then, Cypriotness was not an "ethnic" coalescence of people on the island, but more so a material and metallurgical spirituality inspired by the surrounding conditions of life at the time.

As the goddess of fertility, orgies, sacred marriage and prostitution were part of her cult's gestures honoring her. Her name, again aligned with the name of the island as described by Homer, reinstates the relationship between her spiritual dimension, and the

material conditions of both her following but also the island's economic prosperity of exporting copper (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). As an extension, the myth of her marriage to Hephaestus, the Olympian god of metallurgy, further instigates her status as both the love goddess, but also the main character of the island's culture linked to materiality and copper. Cypriotness and thus the spirituality practiced by the island's population, even in Archaic times, was forged through such materiality as a created condition instead of a "natural" inheritance of ethnic roots reaching back to the "glory" of Ancient Greeks. To proceed then, what needs to be questioned further is the lineage of the celebrated deity, the roots of her erotic nature through her spiritual disciples while also, the ritualistic practices accompanying her sanctuaries as opposed to a de facto linked, Cypriot nationalism connected to a Greek counterpart.

As the most important Aphrodite cult center in the Mediterranean, Cyprus had numerous worship sites and cult entities across its periphery, dedicated to goddess worship. There have been at least 270 sanctuaries found across the island, with votive-figures as offerings within tombs and archaeological sites, and dedicatory inscriptions to her honor (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). If one is to place Cyprus, beyond Hellenicism then we need to again reinvoke the island's actual geographical position as part of the Levantine instead of the assumed European heritage that is currently thought through. The Cyprian Aphrodite was associated with the Phoenician goddess Ashtarte from Syria, as its direct correlation stems from the heavy influence of Hellenic tradition on the island. Starting from the cult of Isis in Ptolemaic Alexandria, whose Hellenic tradition crossed the Mediterranean through trade and reached places like Cyprus, her form was syncretized with Hathor. Similarly, the Greeks adopted Mesopotamian spiritual traits of the goddess Ishtar (also known as Inanna or Astarte) merging into what we would view as that time's Aphrodite while also her consort Tammuz into Adonis - indicating

the blending of Near Eastern and Greek religious traditions. (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). Before her induction within the Olympians, Aphrodite's cultural and spiritual lineage starts from 333 BC, where the first shrine to her honor was created by Phoenician merchants as an ancestor of Astarte. The correlation of spiritual practices is aligned with common practices of Eastern heritage that were applied in places like Sparta and Argos such as burning incense, building shrines of devotion but also dove sacrifices, further aligning with Ishtar and her ancestral warrior aspect (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). Throughout time, such spiritual practices were transmitted to Cyprus and solidified the predominance of the goddess throughout this time's esotericism. Additionally, with the induction of the goddess in Olympus as the foam-birther mother of beauty and love, the lineage of spiritual celebrations on the island shifted, to include festivals and celebrations, but also sexual practices to her honor.

There are two notable sanctuaries within the island that are ascribed to her honor, both having common ritualistic practices but also, slightly deviating in nature. The first one was Amathous, the biggest sanctuary in the Limassol area. In its main consort, there was a festival taking place in the area called Aphrodisia, which leads to a present-day variation - Anthestiria². Aphrodisia featured sacrifices, music, athletic and poetic competitions, a sacred procession led by priests through flower-filled shrines while also a use of burning incense and herbal leaves, use of essential oils, ritualistic bathing and heavy brews of wine (Cyprus: Myth and Cults of Aphrodite). On the other hand, the greatest sanctuary of the time was in Old Paphos (Palaipaphos), as based on the location

² <https://www.limassol.org.cy/el/Anthestiria>

ascribed to her mythical birthplace. However, both sanctuaries even if similar, held different practices in praise practices and rituals in her honor.

To begin with, the two main sanctuaries differed in the intensity prescribed in the ritualistic processes offered to the goddess. Mentioned as far back as the 5th century by Herodotus, in Palaipaphos, what was documented was a sort of ritualistic prostitution of both women that were virgins but also, women who were unmarried yet wished to carry child (Theoi). Beyond the the intensity, their rituals nature were resembling similar patterns as across the island. Patterns and worship that were centered around flowers, perfumes, incense from Arabia and libations of oil, honey and opiate-laced wine or labdanum (National Geographic). As a reflection of the sensual character of her praise though, play and eroticism were a vital part of her honor in Palaipaphos. Philip Young in his research on the cults of the island mentions that the most notorious activity was, indeed, ritual prostitution where following a Babylonian custom, women before marrying had to surrender their virginity to an unknown man within the temple (27). If one takes into consideration that this was considered as the greatest and most active sanctuary at the time, this comes as no surprise. Additionally, as an inclusion to the ritualistic aspect of her following, sacrifices were performed, perhaps of oxen or other animals that were found in excavations (Young 29). The skulls found may have been worn during ceremonies as part of the fertility rites, with shrines filled with lilies, myrtle, lotuses, roses and local ceramics that held ceremonial wines and brews. As a last addition to the esoteric practices of the Palaipaphos cult, there were performance-heavy scenes taking place as rituals. As a move beyond the ritualistic nature of offerings, performance then leads itself to being a vital element in creating a ritual in and of itself.

As a sort of mystery conducted in Aphrodite's honor, re-presentational performance proves to be a heavy influence, not only of the spirituality of the time, but also within my own performance language. To make the direct link with a primal form of "drag" may be an overstatement, yet cannot be left unexamined even at such an early stage. To begin with, there were documentations paralleled to a *couvade* in which a young man performed the part of a woman in labor while also, rituals resembling a wedding ceremony aligned with the sensual spirit of the goddess. Young states that the association between Aphrodite and Adonis parallels Near Eastern myths of a female deity and her semidivine lover such as Inanna and Dumuzi, Ishtar and Tammuz and Isis and Osiris (29). As an alignment with the surrounding spiritual culture, these couples represented the cycle of the seasons, and they were usually depicted through rituals of matrimony. The rituals at hand in Palaipaphos, included a ceremony in which, the king or priest, would marry the goddess that was depicted by the high priestess of the temple (Young 29). Such accounts have been documented through the colonial archive that British ethnographers unpacked in later years.

If one is to follow a direct link from the Archaic sensual past of the island's spiritual practices to modern day puritanism, we need to consider the documentation of British colonialism yet once again as a driving force of change. As noted in the nineteenth century, these ancient references were the subject of lustful depravity and erotic fantasy, sparking early Christian outrage. Noted as late as 1936, Paphos and the Shrine of Venus in the area, was the landing pad of pilgrims which were equally amazed but also ashamed of Cyprus for on the one hand, its treasures and building and on the other hand, the unrestrained licenses of the priestesses who flaunted their sexuality (Young 28). Ultimately, indicating and summarizing a historical shift within the island's spirituality

to that leading in the modern day; Christianity, Westernization and a complete dismissal of any Near Eastern spiritual traditions and cultural traits.

If one takes into consideration the aforementioned past of the cults, and the performativity of men within the rituals, I would only assume that men were the main members of the sanctuary's troop and spiritual consort beyond the priestess. If the colonizing nature of Christian shame was inducted within the then esotericism, would it be too far off to argue for an early form of gender-bending? If Christianity, and colonialism did not change the nature of worship, could ritual and spirituality still have a direct link with queering masculinity? If flowers, fragrant oils, and sexual practices were not replaced by mass and crosses, could spirituality still hold onto a more holistic and embodied approach in transcendence? As a process of indoctrination, Cypriot spirituality was transformed throughout the years, to include practices that are in direct link with the more ritualistic approach our Aphrodisian heritage entails, paired with a more puritan Christian backbone. Leading to the modern-day religious dogmas still ruling and dividing the island. However, if one is to take into consideration the erasing of the island's culture, spoken tradition of spiritual practices is a vital component in pursuing a unified cultural identity.

2.4. Performative gestures - Chaos Magic

Fusing the connection of my Aphrodisian ancestral past with colonial Christianization, practices of divination in Cyprus are still casually within everydayness. In Cyprus, even to this day there are a lot of people, primarily older women, that can read your fate in coffee grounds, broad beans or on your palm. Cleansing rituals of incense burning, oil rubbing and holy water baths are common even in the Christian imaginary; reminiscing of my grandma using them weekly as a form of protection from the evil eye. Hence,

spirituality in Cyprus, even to this day, comes from a culmination of practices and lineages forming a sort of ambivalent and casual link to ritualistic practices, rather than a direct adoption of Christianity. It goes without saying, that regardless of my forced Christianization due to state laws, I never linked my spirituality directly with that of God as we know it in the Western world. Maybe this has to do with a big part in that my parents are socialists, educated and not religious at all. Maybe it has to do with the fact that my attachment to psychedelia has always been more embodied and hands-on, instead of following a consensus. Ultimately, when it came time to construct a map of performative gestures I would practice, I fused methods that were inherently casual and embedded within my Cypriotness with my personal attachment to Chaos Magic, as described by Peter J Carroll and Western esotericism.

My performance practice has been informed from the lineage of my Cypriot ancestry, paralleled to my own submission to Westernization to a big extent. As a representation of my own embodiment as a colonial, yet anti-establishment subject, the lineages of death-centered folk and apotropaic practices of Cyprus and the operational logic of Chaos Magic, are interlinked. In my own understanding, what is hidden behind these two seemingly disparately embodied practices is the realization that altered states of consciousness are operative tools that require methodologies that start from the body. As stated in Liber Null, the foundation of Chaos Magic, “altered states of consciousness are the key to unlocking one’s magical abilities; and these abilities can be developed without any symbolic system except reality itself” (Carroll xxvi). In a similar vein, the propositions handed down from Cypriot esotericism through older generations, use everyday objects and practices to deepen protection, communication but also, invocation of higher powers. By fusing these methodologies through my studio practice, I use both not as reenactment,

but as embodied research leading up to my thesis show. Ultimately, using my body, and the performance, as a system for both.

To begin with, I would like to foreground my choice of Chaos Magic as not that of romanticizing Westernization, but as that of inevitable influence. Submerged within neo-spirituality, derivatives of psychedelia and generic ceremonial abbreviations of Abrahamic religions, the modern-day esotericism I can only speak of as a Cypriot individual living in Europe, is viewed through a Western lens. Specifically, Chaos magic, as articulated by Peter J. Carroll in *Liber Null*, favors method and practice over belief. Stemming from the likes of Aleister Crowley popularizing tantric and Taoist techniques, to Austin Spare dispensing virtually all ancient symbols and ideas in favor of the individual subconscious, Chaos magic favors techniques over dogma to recreate magic as a practical skill for the contemporary world (Carroll xxiv). The distinction between practices over dogma has allowed me to intertwine the personal dimension of subconsciousness, with an artistic expression of movement and performance method. The key elements of this happening was by extracting some operating mechanisms shared from the book, like breath control, motionlessness, fixed gaze and sensory manipulation (Carroll 6-7). Leaking into my studio practice, I gave myself the “task” of embodying time. By locking myself in a studio for 6h at a time, performing singular performative gestures such as, standing still watching a point in space, walking extremely slow, interacting with an object in its non-direct use, and restricting my sense of sight, I rediscovered a performance language that was close to meditation. Ultimately, recontextualizing performance, not so much as a spectacle, but more so as an applied technique of spirituality, and the performing body, as the primary magical instrument.

Primarily, by employing motionlessness as a duration, I aimed to experiment with discomfort and the refusal to “reactive” movements. The main question was “How still can I stay under duress?”. In addition, I wanted to confront my internal dialogue through breathing, to shut out the external, and thus be able to endure motionlessness. My translation into performance was based on the Chaos magic understanding that ritual is a combination of the use of talismanic weapons, gestures, visualized sigils, word spells and magic trance (Carroll 11). Beyond establishing psychosomatic boundaries through breath and bodily repetition, I wanted to bring in my own take on what a ritual like this would entail in a performance. Firstly, by using my own objects as talismans - a bellydance belt, a wig, a veil and poi balls. Secondly, my own bodily practice as a trance by using the bellydance shimmy as a cleansing movement. Thirdly, by using the set as a protection sigil corresponding to the shape of a pentagram formed by me constantly running around its periphery, forming its shape repeatedly. Fourthly, using the recording as the magic spells, stemming from metal and goth songs, and lastly, using the ice sculptures as facilitators of breath but also a conveyor of discomfort.

At the center of this process, as well as the primary dimension of chaos magic, is gnosis. Liber Lux in Carroll’s understanding, is the center of inspiration and of knowledge which takes the form of a pentagram - the main shape in magic - representing and leading towards a state of mind that is filled with nothingness, a state of no-mind (22). In this way, preparing me for a receiving of knowledge to deliver back to the audience, I used the set and the performing conditions to invoke this exact thinking, Carroll places in the core of ritual magic. In this way, creating a protected performance field where ritual becomes practice, performance becomes language and knowledge becomes transmitted. This pendulum between a sort of sensory deprivation that was laid down through my studio practice and its application through a live-show condition was a conscious decision

of attempting a single-point meeting between audience body and myself as viewed in deep meditative states. Even in Chaos magic rituals, this strong ambivalence between exhaustion and hyper-activity elicits a reflex inhibition and paralyzes all perception beyond concentration, creating the effect of one-pointed consciousness or gnosis (Carroll 23). Thus, the sensory overload functioned as a deliberate neurological confrontation with the audience and my own performing body- at last, trying to reach the point of coalescence between the two.

Aligned with Chaos Magic protection, the different rituals used in Cypriot folk magic as the other field of esotericism that I drew upon as inspiration, similarly have apotropaic methods against bad energy and the “evil eye”. As a potential link of my own cultural background with that of Chaos Magic, Carroll states that the legend of the evil eye within Western esotericism, derives from the ability of sorcerers to give fixed ”dead” stares, achieved through meditative practices (7). At last, by using this link, I wished to dwell deeper within Cypriot practices to inform my own performative choices and find similarities in the embodied knowledge I subconsciously apply within my existing spiritual practice.

2.5. Performative gestures - Cypriot folk rituals of death and magic

As a deeper contextualization of my practice, Cypriot death, funerary and apotropaic rituals constituted the deeper structure of my performance vocabulary. Due to the deep colonial nature of how culture is transmitted in Cyprus, my main references for alternative spirituality, comes from the Cypriot Research Center and the writers, Calliope Protopapas and Ioannis Ionas, who have collected various rituals through ethnographic research across the island and a documentation of rituals as handed down by older

generations. Even though, these rituals are not in direct link with the previously mentioned Aphrodite Cults, it is safe to assume that handed down traditions are as continued as they are disjointed by years of colonization and Christianization.

As an initial state of research, I want to clarify that most rituals and folk practices used in Cyprus are apotropaic in character, hence distinguishing that which needs to be opposed as of vital importance for my artistic choices both conceptually and culturally. The correlation analysis between my performative gestures and my ancestral folk traditions, does indeed need a contextualization of "Satan" and thus evil, as a force to go against, yet I will refrain from doing so since I do not wish to dwell within theological studies and Christian literature. Instead, I will use the term "Satan" and "satanic" in this section as an opposition to Christian superiority and analyze my own reading of Satan/ic as an aesthetic choice, summarizing the different strands of oppositional logic within my research forming my drag persona in the final chapter. Ultimately, isolating in this chapter, the cultural and localized dimension of the performative aspects of Cypriot folk rituals and wishing to reappropriate cultural traditions that are somehow erased from the Cypriot imaginary to a fully fleshed performative language.

To begin with, as described by Calliope Protopapas in *Death Rituals of Traditional Cypriot Society* the ritual of *savanoma* constituted the main body of inspiration, in which the corpse was prepared for burial by being dressed in white fabric (73). Aligned with my goal of deconstructing the current moment we are living in as that of death and decay, this lineage of research proved to be poignant. In addition, the figure of the "mortis" was influential in my choice of dramaturgy. Mortis in archaic Cypriot tradition, was the person dressing up the corpse, in most cases being women, who were also hired to scream and mourn during the action, as a way of energy release for the family of the deceased

(Protopapas 76). In a similar way, the screams and harsh sounds accompanying my work, are aligned with the premise of chaos magic in sound concentration, but also, the particular figure of Cypriot folk tradition. Lastly, the choice of sartorial changes in black clothing was conscious in order to invoke an array of sartorial customs relating to the dead.

It was believed that the clothes of the dead should be changed and disposed of since they carried bad energy with them, hence not wanting to curse the spirit of the deceased. Additionally, all corpses were dressed in light colors and white, excluding priests and their wives who were buried in black and lastly, studs and spikes on shoes were to be avoided as it was believed, they invoked Satan by resembling the spikes, used in Christ's crucifixion (Protopapas 88-89). As a reappropriation of such practices and a wished invocation of not only darker aesthetics, but also a darker esotericism, I changed my clothes multiple times throughout the performance yet were consecutively getting closer and closer to the "Satanic" as would be viewed by Cypriot folk tradition. In this way, making myself as a performing body a corpse, a mourner, a priest and a Satanic witch simultaneously. The belief that things would "carry" death and the devil with them, informed my exploration of energetic transmission between performer and audience, as a sort of spiritual contamination.

Another dimension of the work, adopted by Cypriot folk traditions was the use of the ice and incense smoke. The first nudge of inspiration occurred with the question of "How can I capture time visually?" then, exploring Ioannis Ionas research *Superstition and Magic in the Cyprus of Yesterday*, I discovered a correlation with ice-cold water. As a way of averting bad omens and evil spirits, Cypriots according to folk tradition were working with a witch, performing molybdomancy in order to cure sicknesses and

primarily, jaundice (Ionas 242). The ritual included a sieve through which ice-cold water and heated ammunition (silver shots) were used, in order to drench the possessed and avert the bad omens, and after a repetition of the process read the shape that the silver shots would take as a form of divination. The goal of this was to “cleanse” the water through the holes of the sieve and withhold the negative energy. As much water as there was left, the witch would throw it on the possessed’s belly, temples and back of the neck to push away bad energy (Ionas 243). As an atmospheric device in my work, ice was used to encapsulate the idea of “freezing” or capturing time, as paralleled with the Cypriot tradition of protection turned on its head with the inclusion of blood within the sculptures. In another form of death ritual, Protopapa describes dashing someone abruptly with ice-cold water or blowing smoke to them through an incense, usually of olive leaves, myrrh, rosemary and frankincense, as a more direct way to cleanse them from carrying the energy of the dead (64). These similarities between ritual practices became the base of my aesthetic choices of dramaturgy.

Simultaneously, as another dimension of the atmosphere I aimed to create, incense and body oil was used both as a correlation to Aphrodite cults I mentioned in the previous subchapter, but also to more modern Archaic practices of death. Lighting incense was accompanying the dead from the time of death, until the end of the funeral since it was believed that by “smoking” out the energy around the dead with beautiful smells, you provide an offering to the angels to come down and take care of the corpse and simultaneously avert demons from the house (Protopapas 99). With the use of smell, as a dramaturgical element, I aimed to invoke a sense of purification but also suffocation, as the consensus in Finland, is that of smell-less-ness. The smells were that of myrrh, labdanum, frankincense, roses and carnations. Smells that are still used to this day on the Epitaph procession during Christian Orthodox Easter yet have a direct link with both the

Aphrodite Cults but also, the burial folk traditions. By thickening the atmosphere, I wanted to transport the audience body to a non-theater while also providing me with a sort of sensory anchor to what I was trying to invoke - both sanctification and possession at once.

Overall, the dramaturgical elements that constituted the set, culminate in the symbolism of the crossroads as a dedication to Hecate, the makeup as a form of transformative protection, and the hanging of the clothes, as a plea for healing. It was noted that as a form of ritual, mothers would hang the clothes of their sick children, on a tree around the church's periphery, or more specifically, hang them in ruins of churches dedicated to Saint Catherine (Ionas 194, 212). In a similar way, I felt like hanging the clothes would not only invoke such tradition but also, visually represent spirits that are lingering around as performative agents. In addition to more Christian folklore, there has been a documentation of women, burning the tip of a ceramic shard and blacking out their eyes, as a form of protection from the evil eye. Additionally, they would draw a cross with mud on their forehead, as a way of protection and avoiding "headaches" caused by other people's energy; the mud was collected from the ground, after a priest would wash his hands post-service, outside the chapel's entry with some water (Ionas 191). Similarly, using my transformation as the last part of my show, was not only a conscious crescendo in action, but also, an invocation of this lineage as aligned with my own performative ceremonial aspects. Lastly, the most crucial part of performative choice occurred in the symbol of the crossroads and the action of "draskelisma" (crossing/jumping over). Ionas describes the correlation of the symbol, with the Cypriot tradition as:

The symbol of the crossroads and by extension the act of crossing symbolizes universally a sort of center or meeting point. The crossroads

hide the dynamic of concealment and unveiling, with the parts of them that are hidden to be prosperous for dark energies, bad omens and devils. It also symbolizes a way to open up portals of communication between the awakened life, and that of the underworld and world of demons. Taking into consideration the fact that most rituals in Cyprus were happening during the night, with a plea to the moon, we can reach the indirect implication of the goddess Hecate, who was a daughter of the Titans. Hecate was the goddess of crossroads and of the moon, while also being characterized widely as “Tristrati” (meaning having three streets), giving her latin name Trivia. She would always be pictured with a half-moon over her head, while also, with three faces in order for each face to be able to witness each road. Hecate was the mother of witches (also of Circe and Medea), teaching all her female disciples the arts of seduction, poison and exorcisms (193).

As a structural influence I wished to not only pay tribute to the mother of witches but also conceive of a performative way to portray such symbolism.

The performance space for me was existing in a threshold: life and death, celebration and mourning, confrontation and vulnerability, esotericism and performance, inertness and release. Hence, this liminal logic recalls both Hecate and the psychic conditioning a crossroads represents as an unstable meeting point of energy exchange. At last, the act of draskelisma (stepping-over), was what provided a movement resolution to my symbolism wish. As an act of stepping over in the form of a small jump, draskelisma in Cypriot folklore, was believed to have had a negative effect on the person or thing you’re jumping over, in a similar mentality as the energy of a crossroads (Ionas 400). Considered as a bad

omen, “stepping over” meant overshadowing someone’s energy, stopping their growth and blocking their way. The way to “cleanse” someone of such crossing, would be to “cross”/jump over the objects, people or clothes of the child, and by going around their periphery form a cross shape with their right hand (Ionas 401). Hence, in the performance, my gesture of forming sigils on the ground, entering the audience and jumping over the set, constituted a way of both violation and repair, reclamation of energy and hexing and a counter-crossing of spatial consciousness - further instigating the threshold of spiritual practices I wishes to invoke without literal representation.

To sum up, by combining Chaos magic’s unfixed symbolic system, with the Cypriot rituals, my aim was not to represent a direct correlation between the two cultures, nor to re-enact them both on a performative level. Moreover, my goal was to extract the principles that constitute both, as valid esoteric methodologies and create a spiritual bundle of time. Through ice, I aimed to purify, through smoke and smell, I aimed to transport, through repetition and movement, I aimed to en-trance, and through boundary making, I aimed to protect and transform. As an application of spiritualism, both Chaos practices and Cypriot death rituals proved to be the perfect map and union of the oximoron the Cypriot psyche entails. That of a rich and dense past, washed through Westernized notions of perception. Overall, constituting the work, functioning as a ritual, instead of representing one. The stage became a charged field of personal narratives that were left, uncharted by the audience body and the Cypriot folk practices, provided a grammar that was consciously, left explicitly unexamined since it is personal, charged and ancestral. By operating both spiritual crevices, I did not wish to “represent” my culture and my esotericism, but confront both through the space. Thus diagnosing the current cultural moment we’re living in through my body as contagious, dark, exhausted and uniquely sick, yet wishfully transcendental, aligned and protected.

3.0. Grounding metal: queer negativity, drag and performing the end.

3.1. Somewhere in Haringay I hear the trumpets of the end.

As a queer person of color saying I've always felt like I couldn't belong anywhere, is like saying violence is bad. Everyone validates and supports the statement, yet the void meaning of the phrase tends to be printed alongside t-shirt feminisms and rainbow sponsorships, as yet another social warrior cliché to sell ideology to people that would otherwise vote against you. Somewhere along my life, I rediscovered that inner-child that queer mainstream media advertises as poetically asking to be found, pictured with a towel on its head as a wig. The only difference is that mine was also wearing a band T-shirt and the towel on its head, would be headbanged off. As an act of local resonance, I try to dig deeper, beyond theorizations to see what co-aligns between my affect as a queer, and my affect as a metalhead, to reconfigure what performance means to me. I think to myself, how can I tie in all my interests, my macabre, my aggressive, my flamboyant, my personal, within one unity for a show, for a practice, for an outlet?

The answer arrived in the hazy early hours after a metal festival, at an after-party in a London warehouse. The friend who was hosting me, Sophia, played for me an unreleased sample from Frozen Winds, the band she's in. Regardless of how "Nordic" the name may appear, Frozen Winds and their album, *Keys to Eschaton*, provided a quintessentially Cypriot alignment with darkness and black metal, that I had viscerally locked inside. "*It screams in silence, my face of relinquishment*" starts the first song she puts on. Sophia's vocals, in *Spirit of the Womb*, aligned in my head, all the points I was

reaching towards - femme rage, transformation, ritualistic alignment combined with just straight up sick blastbeats. In this manner, I used their songs, *Spirit of the Womb* and *Crown*, that resonate mostly with my own embodiment as a way to shed light in the crevices, my theoretical body folds in.

As a sigil in my imagination, somehow my artistic practice and vision were taking shape to include all the sensitivities I held so strongly tied to what I thought was performance. Digging deeper within my psyche the lyrics hit “*Oh, how our astral bodies have ventured, To the caverns of the Self, But the conscious depths lie, To the subconscious consort of truth*”. I think of Hecate, Nina Hagen, Ron Athey, Siouxsie, Kembra Pfahler, Diamanda Galas, Bob Flanagan, Paimon, Kira O Reilly, Divine, Cradle of Filth, Guillermo Gomez Pena, Witch Club Satan, Luscifer, Heidegger, The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, Eve, that girl I saw at the goth party crying in the middle of the dancefloor and the first time I called myself a f*g instead of gay; all I can think is “*that’s f*cking metal*”. Somehow, my seams unraveling like a blood eagle, I think of all the things that give me pulse, breath and realize that none of these people really belonged. They all carved their own context and started living their art. I think that my trauma is the least interesting thing about me. Instead, I realize that the most dangerous thing I can do to society is to keep on living.

Somewhere within that after-party with the faint sound of metal in the background, conversations about coffins, takes on how make-up for the dead should look like and possessed laughter, I visualize similarities and resonances and no longer try to fit each one on an individual platform. Black metal, queerness, drag and apocalyptic thought, seem to belong to different registries of discourse, yet all three share structural similarities. They use theatricality as a narratological mechanism, melancholy as a past

strategy for survival and transformation as an alternative embodiment, that holds within it a staging and reclaiming of death - both of the self, but also of the world. In this way, what the corresponding attributes are of these seemingly different realms, is an aesthetic reaction to a world that is already in decay. A world that is inherently dying, socially collapsing and ideologically hostile. In this way, what places me in my own performance genealogy, is not so much an affinity with stylizations and artistic practices, but more so, an audacious insistence to live and perform the end, the impossible end, of self, of culture and of society by suffocating them in their own meaning and unveiling, the self and the world as decaying.

3.2. Black f*cking metal.

When one thinks of the genre, the first reference that comes to mind is the now popularized Norwegian context that supposedly birthed black metal in its wider understanding, and the neo-fascist, incel-culture followers that usually fill the crowd of a gig. However, black metal as a genre, regardless of the cultural moments which define it, hides within it a much deeper understanding of interconnectedness, than that of social ideology. It encompasses a freezing of temporality in order to surrender to what our mortality implies: a definite death. Thus, a melancholy that stems from such understanding entails the main premises of Black Metal thought. Black metal as a genre, owes its origins to heavy metal and certain genre titans such as Black Sabbath, Motörhead, Venom, Bathory and Sarcófago, ultimately reaching its defining moment in the Scandinavian second wave, with Mayhem, Burzum, Emperor and Beherit among others (Wilson 10). In my writing, I will avoid referencing the second wave of black metal solely as an effort to avoid redundant analysis and “positioning” against neo-Nazism. Regardless of whether the regions roots in the genre were one of the main reasons I

decided to migrate to Finland, I don't want to entertain a constant juxtaposition between the ideological beliefs of the scenes fascism and my own taste but more so try to tackle the issue implicitly through my own parallelizations and through the portals of analysis that the music opens as a whole.

Scott Wilson in his book *Melancology: Black Metal and Ecology* posits the genre as an all-encompassing ecocritical stance against a dying world. By tracing similar patterns within key musical figures of the genre at large, he paints the picture of how Black Metal constitutes a cultural critique that holds as its main premise, faintly similar to the Goth subculture, melancholy, misanthropy and anti-modernity (Wilson 12). By merging various strands of catastrophic understandings, Black Metal (BM for short) confronts the audience, in a similar vein as horror movies, and the dark sensibilities that I have previously unpacked within this academic journey. However, the complete submersion within the messages of BM is a yearning for a pre-modern existence. One that is full, whole, deep, ritualistic and aligned with the true frail nature of what humanity is.

Frozen Winds in *Spirit of the Womb* state: “*It comes, The mind's / Euphoric / Fatigue / A centre / Of grounded fire / By salt / I cleanse The Temple*”. By painting a picture of consciousness as depleted, the sensibility of BM is captured fully, as not giving up, yearning for cleansing, for healing, against an overstimulated, overproduced and void world. In a similar vein, the thinking of interconnectedness that comes with BM's dark embodiment is not a watered-down new-age spirituality accompanied by macrame pot-holders and vegan lectures about life over death but of a gothic assertion to stay with a dying and decaying world (Wilson 11). Parallel with horror's ability to unveil and confront by using the macabre, BM insists on letting go to the absolute void, our definite

end implies. As a reclamation and complete acceptance of our fate being that of death, BM has a complete acceptance of melancholic temporality.

In another essay from the book on Melancology, Drew Daniel describes melancholy in a dual way. He claims it is “experienced as both a heightened contemplation of heavenly mysteries and a depressive submergence into thing-like muteness” (Daniel 30). As distilled within a transcendent flow and a decapitating stillness, BM uses the melancholy of the end to create the philosophical trance of understanding our own mortality. “This distortion of temporality is also a distortion of tempo: melancholy models a time that is at once ‘ancient’ and ‘to come’ and accordingly keeps a time that is at once fast and slow” (Daniel 30). Similarly, the melancholic, suicidal tempos of BM are characterized with such speed that end up creating a noisy ambient soundscape. One that might feel aggressive, yet once followed, leads to catharsis. By letting go to the seeming chaos of the double-speed base, blastbeats, tense riffs and guttural screams, BM creates a soundscape that is meditative and transformative in the world it creates. To the same extent, BM usually inhabits a planetary scale of awareness through singularity, either through destruction or melancholia, or on the other hand, an entirely post-planetary spiritual, infernal realm. By understanding the current conditions of life, as cold, mechanical, bleak and materialistic, BM rejects the universe as we know it, by longing for a deeper, metaphysical realm (Wilson 16). By rejecting thus the materiality of life, what is brought into question is that materiality itself, as it relates to the guiding forces of life - that of life and death as simultaneously inevitable and meaningless, hence dense with nothingness and spirituality.

The Frozen Winds song continues to undulate evocations of accepting mortal demise and frozen time: “*Cosmic tremors defiled my faith / In the fortress of sacrifice /*

We fade the illusions of trivial soil / Acceptance! Coagulation!". As already mentioned, stemming from the discourse of nothingness, BM invokes the evil realm and by extension Satan, its disciples, angels and legions. By again with-holding an analysis of Satan as the concluding note, I want to stress that even in its fascination with life, death and control, a vital part of BM's omission is that of femininity. Parallel to a queer reclaiming of Black Metal as feminine, what is worth noting is the re-instating of the genre as including deep anti-fascist efforts. Ultimately, providing the fertile ground, not only for this analysis on a theoretical level, but also, the artistic prosperity my choice provided within the language of performance.

3.3. There's nothing more metal than being femme and queer.

Black metal groups are often portrayed as aggressive kvlts with meme-ified incels that choose shock-value over a moral backbone, littering the social consensus of the scene with Neo-Nazi imagery, extreme homophobia, misogyny and violence. Seen once as aggressive collectivities and "wolf-packs", BM and specifically, depressive, suicidal BM, compromises the collective components of the scene, for a more solitary, lonely and sorrow-ful embodiment - hence being more impressionable and prone to the fascist mission, of "adopting" men through their loneliness epidemic, creating these said kvlts (Daniel 31). However, if one is to unpack the nature of such a stance, what is hidden within its re-territorialization is a commodified, solitary passivity posing as a gothic reaction to what the world is. In this way, going against the main component that made metal, what it is - an anti-establishment genre of music meant for people that have had enough of society's bile. By re-invoking the true essence of metal, I wish to ultimately,

set forward the reclamation of the genre as anti-fascist, feminine and queer, as a vital act of defiance.

By using the song, *Spirit of the Womb* as a moment of transformation, I wish to invoke the primordial feminine which encapsulates all spirituality. Birth, in its essence, is not only the mark of a beginning but also, a mark of the end. Everything that is birthed, will and has to eventually die. What if life is not thought of as a conquest of experience, but more so, as a pilgrimage to the end of complete immateriality and hence, full transcendental alignment. Tiamat, Ophis, Shushumma, Ida, Pingala, Lilith, Hecate, Anana, Womb. All these deities', sacred femmes are invoked within song, to a subaltern spirituality that crawls much deeper than heels can pierce the ground, nor can society reproduce through modern -isms relating to femininity. As a plea, "*Gargantuan, tremendous Womb! / Our provenance, of inverted birth!* ", Sophia, proclaims the ultimate feminine form, that of a birth-giver, revoking the right to life to whoever listens to her song. Ultimately, reaching its peak with self-realization through chaos "*Εκ του χάους / Αυτοπραγαμάτωση*".

To begin with, what needs to be set down is a theoretical continuation of the way the genre treats time as aligned with a queer understanding of said time. In *Re/Orienting to Death*, Annie Werner and Brandy Cochrane make a direct link within the way time is experienced in a queer way and by extension to that, a queer approach to death. According to them, queer time is opposed to chrononormativity, referring to the "chronological expectations, norms and practices of a so-called average person moving through life - speaking, schooling, voting, working, being married, having children, retiring, dying" (Werner and Cochrane 628). These variables that are fixed in the supposedly otherwise "free" society, are constructed as signalposts for a normative temporal progress, denoting

a person's maturation and "completion". Constructed under a late-capitalist, heteronormative framework, they fail to address lived experiences that include within them, queerness, illness, infertility, disability and other variables that do not represent the "consensus" of what a life could entail (Werner and Cochrane 628). If one is to understand time under "normal conditions" as heteronormative, then we should ask what can constitute time then, understood as queer? Some variables could be coming-out, gender-affirming care, exploration with polyamory, raving, artmaking, community building or even starting therapy. However, if the normative understanding of time is regulated as such to secure the maximum productivity of an individual, orienting them towards straightness, reproduction, financial security and generally, a future, then their opposites would constitute a habitation of time as queer (Werner and Cochrane 628). Stated in a simpler way, if experiencing time heteronormatively instates a "secure" future and a continuation of life, then death and validating the decay of future, would arguably align as queer.

If we are to examine time and death within queer reality, the "guarantee" of a future is never given. There is a general assumption that we are entitled to a certain amount of life since the cultural norms that dominate our relation to time, fueled by heterosexual productivity and capitalist expansion, are constantly orienting towards a future (Werner and Cochrane 629). However, if one is to live life towards death instead, what is unfurled is a queer relationship not only to time but also to a reality common for queer people. If we are to think beyond the AIDS crisis, violence, suicide and overdoses are lived experiences of many people identifying as queer, thus constituting the proximity to death as miniscule, and the future as precarious (Werner and Cochrane 629). If queerness is to be understood as the political substantiation of a sexually "otherwise" identity, then vital in its completion is the politically oppositional stance it holds to assimilation, normativity

and thus to the heteronormative linearity society structures time through. A queer identity is governed by the opposition to the governing fantasy of realizing an indefinite future – firstly in a strategic way to negate futurity and secondly, by resisting present reality that “we”, as subjects, “have” to invest to (Werner and Cochrane 633). In this way, as aligned to BM theorization, queerness negates not only the governance we have looming over us by the status quo, but also the wishful prosperity of life’s continuation. If reality is persisting over us, then a queer backbone is persisting against it, its continuation, futurity and ultimately reproduction.

By circling back to the Womb and its social contextualization as a method of futurity, what comes to mind is Lee Edelman’s analysis of queerness as attached to the death-drive and the figure of the Child as a carrier of heteronormative socialization. Edelman argues that modern politics are structured around reproductive futurism, meaning that all political actions and positions are substantiated with a future in mind, mostly represented by the figure of the Child and of every subject's decision, aligning with reproduction and the circumstances aiding that (Edelman 2). Hence, by positing queerness as aligned with living towards death, his take not only negates chrononormativity, but by extension the framework that perpetuates this heteronormative framework of futurity. According to him, the figure of the Child, utilized in political campaigns, Christian imaginaries and sexual normativity discourse, indicates a verifiable dimension of unquestioned futurity (Edelman 2). By invoking its protection as the ultimate responsibility, the Child is utilized as a cart-blanche against any argumentation, due to the inescapability of its protection. Who would want to be against children? Who wouldn’t want to protect children? Such analogies constitute not only a security for heteronormativity, but also, an ideological obstacle on political discourse since they render unthinkable, the possibility of any queer resistance (Edelman 2). Evidently, one

may argue that these terms are independent of one another, yet, if we are to preserve the ultimate privilege heteronormativity and reproductive futurism has over any “otherwise”, then that “otherwise” is de-facto inferior within the political imaginary.

As aligned with the nature of queerness, oppositionality proves to be its basic political tool. By proposing a futurist queer oppositionality, Edelman does not wish to go against children, but more so to the structural determinants of politics as we know them and thus, oppose the logic of heteronormative opposition (4). If meaning is to be understood as a future oriented action which is revealed through time, then the reversal of that time queers not only time itself, but also the meaning attached to it. Hence by refusing fixed identities, and history as linear, queerness provides a political otherwise both to futurity and death itself. Essentially, instead of rejecting the ascription to “negativity” that liberal queerness usually comes with, embracing it would constitute an even deeper alignment with its “otherwise” - providing not only a “positive” alternative to failure but a politically engaged “none of the above” to the already self-constituted status quo (Edelman 4-5). Queerness thus, embodies in the same route as BM, the failure of society and reflects it back on itself, using its own tactics of survival, of sublimation and self-constructed fantasy. By exposing this relation between fantasy and politics, queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to both, and how necessary our sublimation is to this relationship as a structure. (Edelman 7). Politics create the bridge needed for these imaginary relations of sustenance to become status-quo. These relations utilize a recognition of the self, as falsely enjoying an ordinary access to presence, to subjectification and to substantiation, by realizing the realm of the future through structural actions presented as “natural” to us (Edelman 8). Even linguistically, queer denoting something “abnormal” and different, reflects the way society views queers at large, but arguably also, the way queers experience society.

As an effort to veer off, liberal rainbow-washed assimilation, the vital proponent of being queer is that it cannot be turned into “universal good” to benefit the social order, or the progress of a natural expectation. Thus, queer negation cannot be assimilated as “contribution” but instead, should be viewed as a radical questioning of the dual relationship between expectation and reality that pertains all social behaviors as bound to a positivist approach to the future itself (Edelman 9). Ultimately, queerness questions the very foundation of society’s categorizations of good/bad, normal/abnormal etc. as vital to an understanding of life.

Edelman concludes that in the same logic, and based on queer socialization, queerness has a direct attachment to the death-drive by association with negation and disruption on an ontological level. If we are to re-read the proximity a queer life has to death through the drive towards such understanding, what is unveiled is a political reaction to the lack of social variability by issuing death as constantly present, futurity as heteronormative, and any absolutism of normalcy as a structure that needs to be dismantled (Edelman 9). Simply put, one can argue for a hopeful, lively future, but the reality of what society entails for some, depends on its inclusion within common understanding. Such an inclusion though would arbitrarily uncover that such pacified futurity is nothing but a heteronormative delusional fantasy.

If we treat our political reality as constantly framed within a fight for “the children” and, by extension, “the future,” what is sidelined is the lives of those who cannot promise or reproduce that future. In addition, what is sidelined is the women whose value is arguably, reduced to their role in producing and sustaining that future. The deeper problem that is unveiled here is the assumption that what we should be protecting is the “guaranteed” future, instead of the reality of the present. Aligned with such

argumentation, what should be defended is not futurity itself but the kind of present, queers and women come to represent in this critique; a present that is insistent, urgent, complex, metal and irreducible to an “imagined” future as it is too aware of its own sustenance against the constant state of threat it exists under.

As *Spirit of the Womb* ends, the guttural screams echoing, repeat “*Ummut Tiamat / Vacancy*”. As a plea to the Mother, the Primordial Sea, the womb is constituted as the beginning of chaos, and the beginning of life. Yet the vacancy dictated through a BM reading would instate the pre-argued creation of a link to death. I am not aware of where the proclaiming of birth as the happiest moment in life started from, but the omission of its vital parts of pain, blood, excrement and flesh further instigates the heteronormative approach to erasing femme pain, and by extent femme rage. Before birth, humans are submerged in the womb, constituting the conditions of our primordial nourishment as those of ultimate darkness and fed with blood. (Daniel 33) Regardless of society’s performative positivity and hopeful futurity, the chthonic yearning for blood and violence, remain as vital parts of our conception. For the carrier, pain is an indistinguishable part of pregnancy, birth and thus the “continuation” of life.

In the womb, as complete darkness surrounds us, blood is constituted as life, forming a sort of vampiric relationship with our mother, our carrier, feeding off them, bringing us closer to mortality. By blurring the lines between life and death, a BM conception of femininity and birth is associated with spilling blood, being open to the reinstatement of death through birth, but also to the violence that comes with being brought into the world. Ultimately, providing not only an intensity with expressing these urges through BM, but also, a hidden reading of the empathetic relationship we have (or at least ought to remind

ourselves to have) with our Mother and by extension, with the primordial and visceral feminine.

Lastly, if we are to follow Black Metal as a genre, we need to notice the shift of the genre's backbone from the initial, traditionally Satanic phase to a more subconscious, primordial phase. As Avi Pitchon describes, it shifted from physical, "danceable" music to something abstract that is too fast to "dance" to and instead, becoming focused on accentuating the atmosphere (307). Becoming almost sexual in its atmospheric ambiance, BM is metaphorically castrated from its masculine, war-obsessed themes, and instead occupies a moody, atmospheric, almost sensually driven nature of life cycles and emotion realms. Pitchon summarizes this shift as: "inversion that cuts so much deeper than that of the inverted cross; by capitulating to the abstract, black metal was subconsciously answering a call from under and beyond the depths of Christian oppression, communing and colluding with the lingering echo of the witches burned at the stake, femicide in the name of the Holy Ghost that negates the earth itself in favour of the binary of good and evil, crime and punishment, leading us sheep in an orderly manner to the afterlife. In other words, black metal inadvertently led itself through the evolution of sound to a place capable of hearing the call" (307). My own understanding of what BM represents, while also, the resonance Frozen Winds's *Spirit of the Womb* did to my artistic research, aligns with the assumption that BM has underlying dark feminine energy, in the ambiance it creates resembling a witch's cry.

As vengeance against Western thought and by extension Christianity, Black Metal and its queer reading, negates life, aligns itself with tipping the balance between hegemonic thought, and reclaims birth as visceral, aggressively feminine, and transcendental. Ultimately, creating an inner vacancy - a hollow space reserved for the awareness and

strife towards death, and the fullness found within that nothingness. Thus resembling the womb, we all came from, and will ultimately, be led back to, making death present, rather than distant.

3.4. Forming a persona through screams and eyeliner

As an extension of the femme rage underlying black metal, I investigated my own aesthetic repertoire in order to form a performance persona, or more like a performing embodiment, that culminates all that I find exhilarating within the intersections this paper occupied. Somewhere within queer techno clubs, darkrooms, goth nostalgia and theoretical discourse, I saw an entity forming that could hold all of the above. In the same way as performing, I believe that drag simply demands of one's body, to occupy space in that way.

When I started theorizing and conceptualizing the way I wanted to present to the world, I naturally strayed away from the pageant-like femininity, mainstream drag is usually portrayed as since my genderqueerness was always anchored within abstraction. I wanted to embody my ancestral past of Cypriot mysticism, my abhorrent metal stimuli and combine them with my flamboyant, unapologetic and militant queerness. Somewhere within this exploration, I birthed a persona, inspired by daemons and Satan, black metal and bellydance priestesses that would later on take the name *Gravity Grave*. As a sexually fueled demon, Gravity Grave informed my performance language as an effort to perform impossible bodies of knowledge and use drag, corpsepaint and dancing as a violent survival aesthetic response, while putting a face, to the accusations and assumptions already occupying the intersections I aforementioned throughout this paper - orientalism, black metal and queerness.

As aligned with the theorization behind queerness and Black Metal, my work has in its

main core, a refusal to assimilate and fit into stabilized identity formations and palatable readings of what a subjectivity like mine should dictate. As aligned with the energy of both corpsepaint but also of drag, the performance statement I wanted to push across, deals with an impossible now and a consciously incomprehensible presence. In this way, throwing my body in the plane of impossibility and incomprehensibility against, race, sexuality, culture and conformity. Corpsepaint aesthetically, announces “I am dead”, yet with the recognition of its own artificiality also “I am not yet, not quite, not really, dead” - thus using an occultation of subjectivity, to exist within the dual planes of life and death (Daniel 46-47). As an extension, the politics behind confronting this dualism, tie in the temporality of the violent present as juxtaposed with a futile futurity.

Drag on the other hand, performs in a similar vein, an artificiality that glorifies its own plasticity as existing between “real” and unreal. As Stephen Farrier describes, drag is not restricted to gender imitation but to a layering of cultural references, elements and moments in time, that shape drag into the form of a performance (193-194). Existing in a place of limbo, both corpsepaint and drag occupy identity as liminal within its own awareness, its own theatricality, its own tragic efficacy. If both drag and corpsepaint relate to specific communities, then my body, occupying both in a similar vein, shows the co-aligned elements of violence present in both. By extending this instability within my own embodiment, what does it mean for my “orientalized” body, to perform the way that it does, bellydance, drag, black metal - all “foreign” exoticized ways of embodiment - while incorporating the affect of violence?

Corpsepaint, stemming from semblance of a dead body, puts to the surface a violence against and a dismissal of vitality, as a black and white face takes shape. As Drew Daniel summarizes, it transforms the face into a “battlefield of relational struggle between a black surface and a white surface while exposing the historical disjunction between the

absolute black of early modern melancholy blood and the absolute pallor of post-Romantic depressive whiteness” (43). If we trace back the history of corpsepaint, one is led to early modern medicine according to which people with melancholy were believed to have dark-looking skin due to an excess of black bile in the body, thus making it visible on their skin.

Evidently, such an assumption represented a demographic of not only financial and social status, but also of a racial one. However, during the Renaissance, the idea changed into melancholy being associated with a more “refined” kind of emotional state of sadness, making pale skin the predominant indicator reaching until Romanticism with “pallor” suggesting a loss of vitality, linked to tuberculosis (Daniel 37-38). Simply put, even the archetype of the goth has been racialized and reappropriated by whiteness as aesthetic, opposed to its initial state indicating sickness, poverty and blackness. It is this exact power disjuncture that corpsepaint arguably embodies, as a complete surrendering to an already sick world. In this way, representing numerous insufficiencies - “the insufficiency of any face to secure a solid and persuasively stable, singular subjectivity” while also the insufficiency of “racist ideologies of whiteness, already belied by the merely ontic pinks and browns of actual skin tone” exposed by the audacious artificiality of white make-up (Daniel 43). If I am to make a parallel alternate, the connecting link between the lineage of corpsepaint, and my own practice, my “orientalized” body in drag performs in the same registry as operating through a colonial fantasy consumed as “queer” liberation.

In *The Bodies of Others*, Selby Wynn Schwartz critiques the similar surface logic used in reading drag performances as indicating the importance, their impact even within the critique itself. The fact that we believe eligible identities are seen as sitting on the surface

of bodies comprehensibly, as cloaks of validity, dressing a “visceral interiority” already indicates the power and potential drag holds as a framework (Schwartz 3). However, the aggression that comes with my own refusal of comprehensibility does not only reject assimilation but also a palatability within queer liberal identity politics - drag being now a mainstream operational tool. In this disruption then, drag becomes not only a tool of exhibition but also one of confrontation. Ultimately, working with the trope already inherent in drag, of opposing occupying space in a certain way, based on the body you were born in (Schwartz 6). Similarly, then, what does it entail if I am to dance, bellydance, with metal, in drag? If dance is realized as a capacity to produce movement with meaning in the broadest sense of the word, and drag is a way of using surface markers to re-signify a body’s semblance, then the combination of the two, take gender from the surface of the body, and embed it within the kinetic and kinesthetic experience as malleable (Schwartz 3). By rewriting these eligibilities through surface excess, what I strive for is a destabilizing and a tensing of myself as whole, my dancing as “exotic” and my queerness as palatable. Thus, by incorporating metal into the mix, sharpening both drag while also, bellydance, as a reactive headbang and an internal moshpit against definition.

Using the same logic of conscious refusal, drag and the aesthetics of excess function under the reading of metal as belonging within the same category - that of camp, over-aestheticized, artificially grand performativities. As part of this destabilization, camp provides a toolbox to unpack not only gender markers, but also performance behaviors. As Susan Sontag describes in her seminal text *Notes on Camp*, camp’s essence is rooted within its affinity for the unnatural, the artificial, the exaggerated, re-instating subjectivity as Being-as-Playing-a-Role (56). Through this exact logic, Black Metal utilizes corpse-paint to signify not only a surface “hyperaggression” but also an internalized “hyperdarkness”. My work operates under the same logical framework, by utilizing

darkness and aggression through mediums that would otherwise be unassociated with - those of bellydance and drag. Ultimately, using the key elements of excess, camp, artificiality and stylization to form an embodied critique of not only the artforms I invoke (metal, drag, bellydance), but also the concepts I deal with (queerness, anticolonialism, spirituality). Submerged within ambiguity, an understanding of both metal but also, my practice as camp is to invoke camp's basic sensibility of duality between the thing as meaning and the thing as pure artifice (Sontag 57). This kind of resonance with camp's sensibility, may be the closest I've ever gotten to answering the question of "Who is your audience?". Simply put: the girls that get it, get it, and the ones that don't, don't.

Being fully aware about how small the intersection I carved for myself is and how complicated the bridge between these sectors is, I want to treat the pretentiousness and complexity of such a feat as yet another element of camp sensibility. By embracing failure, camp art uses a failed seriousness, to represent the humorous and the exaggerated; it proposes itself as serious yet is aware of its unseriousness as "too much" and offers a different set of aesthetic standards by reversing the question of "too much" to "is it even enough"? (Sontag 59, 61,62). It is under this exact premise, which I weaponize "too muchness" and the pretentiousness of asking these grandiose, spiritual yet ontologically grounded and embodied questions, in this performative language. Hopefully, making their alignment as productive and their exploration in this manner, as refreshing. Ultimately, examining whether the politicization of the questions I push across, are aligned with the strategy of camp and metal, can be used as survival strategies for the subcultures and communities I belong in.

As an end to the rationale behind my artistic choices, adaptability and assimilation provide a sort of incoherent conclusion. Richard Dyer, when talking about camp, describes how queer subjects have used such aesthetic sensibility as a form of adaptability

to the surrounding culture. He describes how queer people tend to be able to “drag” themselves into any situation because we had to cultivate the skill of disguise, of appearing one with the crowd in order to hide the innate queer nature that was busting out the seams, leading to the development of a “queer eye” for surface, appearance, forms, style (Dyer 114). Camp then emerges from this necessity for survival as a technique for alleviating pressure. As a form of self-defense, queer people can sharply and brightly make fun of themselves as a way to deconstruct and "demystify" the real awfulness of their situation by developing the ability to not take things too seriously (Dyer 110). It is this camp, adaptive logic I choose to adopt to control, my own self-reflection as a performing body, as a social body, as a “male” body, while also the audience’s logical assumptions about me. By refusing to fit in my trauma-bound queerness, my exoticized Cypriotness and colonized bellydance, I attempt to re-camp my already camp persona. Making my queerness dark, my Cypriotness undecipherable, my bellydance aggressive and my Black Metal, feminine. Reaching the point of recognition of identity, not as fixed but as a layered embodiment that exceeds readability through the meaning reverberations, the signals it projects emit. Using hyper-visibility, hyper-aestheticization and hyper-intensity as tools for refusal, for survival and for anti-assimilation.

3.5 Everyone is queer but the queers

I often speak of the Oppression Olympics, a liberal understanding of my identity implies. The kind of competitive marketing where minorities, fringe subjectivities and frail social identities are forced to compete in, in hopes of winning the breadcrumbs late-stage capitalism has thrown our way. Plastered across funding opportunities, “safe” spaces and hierarchical inclusions within scenes, identity politics are used as a chastity belt to monitor the way inclusion can now be advertised exclusively as a dress code. As

a wolf in sheep's clothing, one that forgets where it started from. It can now be bought within a scroll of your finger, under hashtags of genocides, queerbaiting male celebrities and hyper-capitalist dolls resembling a revival of lobotomized 00's bimbofication. One that forgets, it started from black trans sex-workers, uncelebrated factory-workers, asylum-seekers, poor femmes and "disease-ridden" fairies. I question whether these Olympics will be broadcast globally, or whether they are summarized within the unpaid open-calls we ferociously apply to. Who wouldn't want to spend 6 months doing unpaid labor, in a cold shoebox, somewhere along a war-zone now refurbished with Ikea furniture as a liberal safe-space? If we are to program a lineup, of art, of culture within this competitive floor, how can works that are of life and death, be programmed alongside theorizations of forms, structures and academic masturbations?

As a unified strategy, I propose the following: resonate the shared mechanisms that make queerness unapproachable, metal transcendental and movement camp. By using artificiality as a weapon, cut through the underlying passivity a moderated safe space implies. After all, who would want to be natural, when you can be supernatural? Use the too-muchness we've been chronically diagnosed with, as a volatile projection of mayhem, destabilizing comprehensibility. Who wants to be understood when they could be revered instead? From now on, whenever someone asks me, "How I am" I'll only answer with "I'm not." Approach failure as our right to effort and rediscovery, instead of the linear expectation a queer labor results in, in this rigged game we've been thrown into. The only thing we should be identifying as, is a threat. Leading back to questioning the limbo we exist in by reclaiming our own deaths as ever-present and aggressively camp. When I go out, I'll go out in blue flames. Ultimately, reclaiming our own performance as survival strategy, against the unapologetic beige, our inclusion within the liberal sphere suffocates us with. I've got a pair of heels, and I know how to walk them.

4. “The best way to end from is a was” or simply: Conclusion.

4.1. Gravity Grave.

*Get back, get back again and again / I've been here since I can remember
when / My life is a boat, being blown by you / With nothing ahead, just the
deepest blue / To me you're like a setting sun / You rise, then you're gone
/ Come back, come back again and again / I've been here since I can
remember when / The world just spins whilst mine stands still / Nothing's
changed in your gravity grave.*

– The Verve “*Gravity Grave*”

What is a persona to a person? I remember when I started raving, I wanted to completely surrender to whatever action I set my mind on. I somehow felt that George, could not get away with the things I wanted to do – run around naked in a club and flirt with the most dangerous people there, lose myself somewhere within the effort of finding me. As an act of coming-out, I wanted to create a persona, that holds within me all the cultural references that made me into the artistic bundle of ideas that I shed on this paper. To claim there was a linearity within my creation would be a lie. All I knew was that I wanted to be sexy, bellydance and stay true to my metal upbringing. As hermeneutics were entering my life, I stumbled upon this song by The Verve called *Gravity Grave*.

As a spiral movement of futility, the song represented the contradictions I felt inside, needing to be fleshed out. As an act of defiance, I felt that the most appropriate way of embodying these contradictions, were by enfleshing a sex-obsessed “devil”, that is

“Oriental” in nature and “Black Metal” in character. To claim Satan as my biggest inspiration, would be a disregarding of all the *real* people that set the way for me to be here – briefly mentioned previously in the essay. However, as an act of camp resonance, and academic edging, Satan needs to join the party.

In Christianity, Satan is popularized as the “fallen angel” representing evil. As a big red, horny devil, that rules the Underworld, ready to burn us sinners for the broken moral compasses we’ve been following. However, if read through Black Metal Theory, Satan proves to be more of a systemic approach to thinking, than a religious antagonist. Eugene Thacker in *In the Dust of this Planet* describes that “Satan or ha-satan passes from the Hebrew Bible (where it designated an angelic divinity that tests one’s faith) to the Koine Greek of the Septuagint, to the Latin Vulgate of the Old Testament, before its appearance in the Gospels, where the figure of Satan is often depicted as a malefic figure poised against monotheistic God, rather than against humanity per se” (16). As a functional opposition to Christianity, Satan reinstates the religious dominance dictated by the church, while also the victim position of its disciples being in “constant” threat”. As a clear antagonist, Satan is used as a cementing tool for the definition of Orthodoxy by juxtaposition. Before the 19th century, Satanism was defined as heresy, as a directly inverted belief system, while through the religious challenges of Romanticism and the aesthetics of the gothic and decadent movements, Satanism took on the more “poetic” and “aestheticized” form we now think of it through by establishing its inverted logic as overlapping with occultism, magic and offshoots of spiritualism (Thacker 17). Following the spirit of opposition, Satan becomes a tool for Christian subordination in which anything “demonic” is considered heretical, adversary and non-tolerated. Associated with witchcraft and necromancy, its logic of opposition and inversion is opposed to the religious political authority and holiness of the church as seen historically through the

violence of the witch hunts, persecutions and inquisitions (Thacker 16). If one looks beyond the direct opposition to “God”, Satan is used as a personification of the destabilizing power against structural reality. Scott Wilson describes Satan as: *“an untenable metaphor for nonknowledge, that marks the boundaries of being and nothingness, joy and the abyss, center and margin, life and death, man and beast; as the demonic figure of paradox, possession and the impossible, Satan threatens the undoing of these distinctions, holding them both together and apart, the locus of desire and imagination in a Godforsaken universe”* (15). In this way, Satan is not only the opposition to a religious authority, but a threat to authority as an overarching narrative, embodying its limits and binary nature.

Circling back to contemporary culture, demons are abound, even if not believed in. If we take into consideration that we live in a “post-secular” world in which religion, theology and mysticism trickle back into opaqueness, then black metal and its association with the “Satanic” as reactionary creates a similar circling back to the essence of the previously mentioned opposition (Thacker 15). By creating a subcultural footing for a social analysis, the paradox nature of practice, becomes one with the embodied. By exemplifying this return to a “primal”, Black Metal thinking, engages with “black magic, demons, witchcraft, lycanthropy, necromancy, the nature of evil, and all things somber and funeral” (Thacker 16). In this way, by using the aesthetic language of extremity and negation, to create an aesthetic force, beyond the literal entity that “Satan” was described as. It is in this light exactly, which my choice of “demonic” presence resides in – that of inversion, confrontation and threat. Similarly making Satan, not only a strong association with Black Metal culture, but also a powerful figure for queer reappropriation.

Queer people have long been positioned within the same framework as the demonic - hedonistic, immoral, unnatural, contaminated, evil. Defined through dogmatic logic, queerness just like Satan, has been defined by opposition, viewed as a threat to the holistic and pure dominant norms that are projected by normalcy. By drawing inspiration from dark aesthetics, Satanic imagery and goth/metal subcultures, my drag persona, deliberately aggravates the assumptions projected upon queer people as “villains”. As a transgressive embodiment, Gravity Grave as a performance, just like Satan, aims to not oppose normativity but question the rationale behind it as unstable. In this way, exposing how such categorizations, even within queer thinking, are constructs stemming from Christian exclusion. Ultimately, reclaiming and embodying the “demonic” and “Satanic”, as a site of exposition, turning accusation into performance, and marginalization, into a somatic form of resistance through imagination, expression, glamour and attire.

4.2. What Now?

As thinking of a conclusion, I try to summarize the intersection my identity holds within it once again. I hold close, the ancestry I so desperately wish my culture still associated with. I think of the priestesses of Aphrodite, drinking laced wine, offering themselves to a higher cause. I think of the turmoil my national identity is defined by as a site of contingencies. Queerness, Drag, Black Metal and Horror Aesthetics prove to be the wished route of absolution – offering survival strategies, confrontational mechanisms and coping techniques, to summarize an “otherwise”. I wish I could claim that this paper will do what it claims. I wish it does to you, reading this, what my show did to me. I want to lay out the interview I gave myself at the last rehearsal as an effort to reciprocity:

- What is this show for you?

It's a way to unfold all the crevices I feel are not talked about in the world; or at least, not in this way, not in this context

- Yes, but what is it *for* you?

It's a confrontation and a sacrifice. I let go of this exact thing I just performed - the "performance". Then, I sacrifice it for something new to pop up. I guess it's a farewell and a potential hello.

- Now, show wise: what are you doing?

I'm presenting various gestures that have unlocked stuff for me in these 2 years in Finland. I'm trying to capture a 2-year discourse in 4h and 30'. All gestures revolving around themes that are related to me personally as a practitioner, but also to the beauty I see the world through.

- Why do you choose to talk like "yourself" even if you're dressed up?

The thing is, I've always felt not-heard. Maybe dressing up is a way for people to pay attention to what I'm saying. Maybe it's a way for them to make peace with these harsh truths they already know yet need a "scream" of aesthetics upfront. Maybe the joke's on me, and this is who I'm always speaking as, even in everydayness. Now I just have the outfit to back it up. Maybe it's who I've needed to be, but out.

- What's the what?

The what is a process of unveiling - a process of sacrifice, an ailment of horror, confrontation and shock but with a side of glamour and laughter.

- What's the how?

It's exposing myself first, exhausting myself second and then completely killing off any trace of "objective" identity left, while making the world (and the audience) complicit.

- Lastly, what's the why?

To hopefully make people feel something. Make them angry, energized, proud, activated for being weirdos, leftists, goths, f*gs, whatever - maybe a little bit guilty for being white and hetero. Either way, make them leave with something that'll open for them later. Kind of like an STD – probably loved getting it, but now you need to do something about it.

Now what that "something" will be, is no longer under my control. I've done all I could, which is perform. I've taken the last bow and had the curtain call. Here are those words:

4.3. Savanoma – TNPB – 04/09/25.

Now. Now, Now. Now, Now. Now. Given any chance to do so, and any means, we shall make a hell of our own earth, with our own lives, our own bodies and the bodies of others. We are the devils. All dogma contains within it necessarily its own blasphemy, all orthodoxy contains its heresies. A union of church and state produces something that is neither, but far greater in both appetite and execution than either. A thirst so powerfully strong, it gave more than it could give; the air turned to ash, the streets choked with bodies, bodies themselves ran through with pestilence, riven with war and torture, a chalice of deprivation overflowing, and yet this is never enough. More and more fall so that more may rise to take their place. In the end, each of us perform all of the parts of

*the masque. Given what we want, the end of our desire, we beg for it to stop. When it ceases, we beg for it to start anew. And so it does, again and again, over and over, amen.*³

What you expect of me in this performance to do is as a person of color to victimize myself and spend the whole time convincing you why my vulnerability is worthy of empathy. Why the deep side of my flesh's saturation, suddenly is worthy of white tears. Why my queer dissonance is worthy of your heterosexual compassion. The funny thing is that I've had 7 lifelines by now passing through me, like arrows on a broken heart, that connect the ideas you have of me as a body, as a performing body, as a political body to the actual reality of who I am as a person. My country has been colonized and so has my flesh for the Western ideals of prosperity and calculated locality to have a place to fester, infect and slowly kill, with their unapologetic expansion. Like cancerous cells, killing the planet, eco systems and people with them.

Well, I was once a person with a voice that could only whisper. I thought living in complete opaqueness was the only way I could somehow be accepted, as if anyone has power over me to accept or disavow me. I thought that using small particles of expression, reserved for stages, safe spaces and rainbow covered holes in the wall, was the only way my I could be an I that sees. Little did you know, my past and what I went through are the least interesting things about me. The sob story of how I was closeted, was forced to be abused, do the army, act a certain way or whatever other fiction, pop culture has made you believe queer people embody, is nothing more than trauma porn to alleviate you from

³ Review by: unawarewolf. *Comments on The Devils* (1971). *Letterboxd*, letterboxd.com/unawarewolf/film/the-devils/#comments. Accessed 25 Mar. 2026.
The Devils. Directed by Ken Russell, performances by Oliver Reed and Vanessa Redgrave, Warner Bros., 1971.

any responsibility of what you enable, indulge or play a part of in the social ailment we call modern life. I thought to myself, I need to appeal to the masses. I need to take care and be cautious of how I present myself to white people because they're fragile. I need to be aware because I'm triggering, I'm really loud, too unkind, intensely direct and simply not white, skinny, blonde or victim enough to participate in the oppression Olympics you wish me to somersault in while u masturbate using my blood as lubricant. I wish I could sit here, soft, bothered about how life has been unkind to me, yet I have no time to waste since the only thing left for the left to do is to go right. And I think we're already too late. Instead, I'll take on in front of you the role of the villain. The unapologetic murderer of the current moment. Suffocating orgasms of pity, slicing wide open the throats of woeful exclamations and gut punch the performative trigger warnings you need to feel safe about someone else's pain, in case any of their dirty affect leaks on your beautiful beige kashmir coat. Let out a scream for this space is not safe. It's volatile and liminal and smells of feces and cum and embalming fluid and it actually allows you to feel something beyond a muted hue on white skin. Now there's only one right left to do; promote hideosity, glorify the grotesque, revel in repulsion and by God, be ugly!

How do I even start speaking? How can I even try right now to produce meaning for this moment? The now that I just said now is no longer the now that is now. This was the goal. I wanted to perform ephemerality, impossibility, the death of a moment and its hyper-presence. To perform the impossible now. We're told that performance is different to theater, due to its spirit and its embodiment but in reality, they both use meaning to suffocate a moment with presence. Performance artists just like to do it in weirder ways in random rooms. "I think of shamans and performance artists as colleagues. The only

difference is that shamans use their tools in ritual to heal whereas performance artists use theirs to diagnose social illness”⁴ - and we’re some sick motherfuckers.

That was the end, the last time I was on stage. I was talking about the relationship of God and artist as one of a dominatrix with no safe word and her slave. God being the dominatrix. What’s the difference? Just because he has followers? I have more on Instagram. His though are rapists. Oh sorry, I meant pedophiles. Just like God, artists are a bunch of people trying to provide an answer to a question they never finished formulating. Walking on water? How about you do something useful like, reducing taxes, or freeing Palestine? There’s so much pressure on artists to somehow get it right, and be more things than just pretty-makers, as if God did anything really. He didn’t even get his girl pregnant.

This is also the double-fault of not only artists, but also humans. We falsely believe we’re the children of Epimetheus, simply because he gave us the gift of fire, the gift of creation and the power over things, our ego. In reality though.....hmmm.....reality.....lol.....we are the children of his brother, Epimetheus, who was given the task by Zeus to provide every living being on this planet with a skill. The zebra speed, the lion power, the dolphin bisexuality and to bottoms no gag reflex. But when it came down to humans, he forgot, he ran out of skill. However, that’s exactly what he gave us. Forget-fullness. The ability to constantly return. The power of hermeneutics. We are being, we are not bees. We actually aren’t that useful. That’s why we have the need to constantly re-enact and re-live and re-feel and re-peat. Words, situations, feelings, sex. The word for forgetfulness in Greek is lithi (λήθη), which

⁴ (Gómez-Peña 4:53–5:17)

is also the compound for the word “aletheia” (ἀλήθεια), the truth. Stemming from the derivative a- and lithi. A-romantic, A-sexual, A-litheia. The truth then is the Un-truth. Lithi though in Ancient Greece, was also a river leading to a lake where people would bathe and ask from the Gods, to grant them their wishes. To make their narratives discourse. This is the duality of being. On the one hand, narrative has a one to one reality, lol, to each and everyone one of us. As many people as there are in the world, there are as many narratives. Narrative is emotionally verified since that is your own reality, lol again. Hence it’s valid. On the other, you have discourse, discourse is the moment you exist in a bigger body of knowledge with the people around you, in various subcategories expanding and expanding constantly taking into consideration the shifting networks and power dynamics between knowledge distribution. There is an infinite number of discourses we exist in. That is meaning. Maybe that’s also the meaning of life. Understanding the moment, you are submerged in the lake of forgetfulness with the person next to you.⁵

MOANING

Do you know that the universe is one big vagina? I love women. I came out of one. We all were welcomed to earth by the sound of a woman screaming. That’s metal. Shit, vomit, blood and sacrifice, to highlight the miracle of life. And imagine the irony, of the happiest country in the world having the highest percentage of violence against them. Damn, talk about True Finns. I don’t understand why we’re so obsessed with babies and life instead of the people that bring them to us. I mean, I personally swallow my babies. I

⁵ This passage is a personal account and recollection of the philosophy I’ve read in the past – primarily theories of Heidegger and Stiegler. I’ve included in the citations, references of the books that correlate to these statements roughly.

mean, even in death.....before embalming fluids, the corpse was kept within the house, cared for by the women of the family. Decorated with flowers around, resting on a pillow filled with herbs to cover the stench. Now, it is usually covered by random cables and sounds, white polyester and overhead lighting. How tragic. In the West, we live our lives against death. With potions, pills and injectables to make us live longer, look younger and feel like we're able to cheat death. When did death stop being a rite of passage and become a medical failure instead? What is there really worth fighting for SO hard to live? I guess, seeing reparations given back to indigenous people or your rapist dying or just your mum happy, now you screaming for her instead.

*I always say, if you have to force something out it's probably not a fart. Sometimes it's douching water. You know, my dad used to say it takes a real man to stand on his own two feet in society. And he is right, it does. But it takes a real queen to do it heels, because it f*cking hurts. I actually feel like Epimetheus, tortured on a rock for eternity, eaten by vultures. The rock being the fact that I hate men, and the vultures being the fact that I'm attracted to them. The rock being that I hate white supremacy, the vulture being me always moving to a white country. Not all men, but somehow ALWAYS a man. Not all white people, but somehow always white people. I'm actually neither white, nor a man. I'm actually not even gay. I'm a f*ggot. I'm a f*ggot with a weird name that no one can pronounce. It's YO – RGOS.*

AUDIENCE REPEATS YO-RGOS

Great, that was all white.

The reality of the situation.....lol.....reality.....is that I've cut my heart wide open, only to find another one inside. I think of my ancestry and the possibility to

perform a self, with the same history as me, yet with better embodiment. I guess this is why I want to kill the world. I want to make it into a performance. Beautiful enough to watch yet doomed to die in its own moment. Never being able to be repeated, no matter how many times you try. I would cut the head off first, using a saw. Then I'd proceed to the arms and then the legs. I would save each one in a different suitcase with cultural objects and hidden across the big vagina we're living in, for others to find. To somehow try and save whatever beauty's left from those telling us how we can perform, how we can talk and what colors we should use to highlight our body, while we're trying, looking for a spring in a mountain, but who needs water when you are the fountain?

*I'm thinking of all these lonely people with power and how they made us believe that seeking companionship and resonance with one another is weakness. How the person you detest needs to be the one easier to reach. How the strata of the social fabric we so eagerly try to rip consists of only adversaries that mirror those parts of us that feel integral to how the other others. If I am to understand the other as something different, something outside of me, how the f*ck do I even know what it is if that difference doesn't nullify itself the moment, I was able to conceive it? They make us believe that what we hate is the thing we can encompass. The thing we comprehend. The thing which our understanding can create as a concoction of spit, hair, cum, blood, dead skin cells and other useless DNA simply because, who needs reproduction when you have consumption? As an impossible feat of disappearance, the enemy is left unimagined as we always fall back to blaming our systems and those lonely people for their idiocy and their thoughtlessness. Never for their intention and incentive. Never for their pre-determined malice as that's unfathomable for one to understand. Never for their pre-coordinated silencing, nor their civil rape. As a hum, I feel the resonance echo and spiral on absurdity as I scroll through another undefined submission to my own inability. To another well-*

fabricated, well lubricated academic masturbation of how complicated the problem is, sided to its unreachable solution. How the burning flesh and missiled wounds, they flaunt in front of our eyes, will not reach our core nor our location as overhead surveillance is given, checked, provided willingly. How else will I buy the fastest option, to the cheapest comfort? How else will my nerves prolapse out my eyes as I bear witness to the fall of an empire I helped built? Maybe the only way for something to be birthed, is for the previous one to die. Maybe its insistence on living is the milieu of cognitive dissonance we're gagged by as we deep-throat information. Maybe its constant transmutation is its cancerous ability to feed of flesh and kill brain cells, while its head slices open, rattling teeth keeping time to the next unfamiliar submission. Maybe it's a look that penetrates while its gaze turns you into stone with the brightness adjusted to the fullest but its mode on airplane mode. I think maybe it's time to let go to its un-relentless panting and put our foot on its neck, slowly twisting its crackled neck to the weight we once had.

My statement is quite simple:

THE OLD WORLD IS DYING AND WE WILL WEAR ITS CORPSE.

THE OLD WORLD IS DYING AND WE WILL WEAR ITS CORPSE.

I think maybe it's time to murder it

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