Some notes on the politics of queer affection based on the experience of making "We Who Feel Differently" and "Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public": A Lecture by Carlos Motta

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I am delighted to introduce our visiting artist Carlos Motta. Carlos is a multi-disciplinary artist whose practice literally operates at the intersection of form and knowledge. Not surprisingly The Archive has become a kind of ideal studio for him. He engages this space of knowledge to work through a myriad of different discourses and voices; ultimately formulating artworks that become vehicles for proliferating meaning.

Central to any archive and also vital to Carlos's work is a profound attention to the problem of memory. What does it mean to remember and how do our intimate and personal experiences enter the archive to become public records and ultimately shape the tomes of history. Or perhaps the more poignant question is, how are they forgotten?

To consider these issues Carlos's work draws upon political history. Inviting the individual voice into the official record, his work produces counter narratives that recognize and even celebrate suppressed histories, communities, identities and ideologies.

Of course, the success of such an approach to studio art making is fully dependent upon its ability to become visible and assert a presence in the world. I am happy to report that Carlos Motta has been very successful. In 2008 he was named a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow. His work has been presented internationally at venues such as MoMA/PS1 Contemporary Art Center and The Guggenheim Museum, amongst many others. He teaches at Parsons The New

School of Design and at the Vermont College of the Fine Arts.

Some notes on the politics of queer affection based on the experience of making "We Who Feel Differently" and "Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public."

Tonight I will discuss the "politics of queer affection" based on the experience of researching, producing and publicly presenting two recently completed art projects, "We Who Feel Differently" and "Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public." By "politics" in this context, I am referring to the contested field of antagonistic social relations sparked by the misrepresentation and ignorance of sexual and gender difference; by "queer," I am referring to a fluid, sensitive and generous understanding of sex and gender – one that is not defined by rigidly constructed categories of identity–; and by "affection," I am referring to the complicated matters of the heart and the soul.

I am interested in the social, sexual and political dynamics of queer affection primarily because I identify as a "queer man" in my private, personal and public lives. I reject the conservative belief that sexuality is something that only matters in the bedroom. Sexuality is one of the primary agents of social relations, hence discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a perverse form of social exclusion, which should be openly confronted it all its complexity and nuances, its history and its current status, here and elsewhere.

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Before I continue to discuss these issues, I would like to give you a little background of my artistic production so that you will understand the concerns that have motivated my work and my particular interest in documentary practices as well as in the construction of archives: In the last five years I have been working on a long-term cycle of projects, "The Democracy Cycle," which intends to investigate the political term "democracy" and its relation to social

minorities. The “Cycle” includes the work “The Good Life,” a database documentary and archive that features 500 interviews with pedestrians on the streets of twelve Latin American cities, whom discuss their understanding of democracy as a political system locally and its effect on their lives. The interviewees also speak to their knowledge about the history of U.S. interventions in that region, and its role in promoting “democracy” through ideology and economic and military warfare.

As I was working on “The Good Life,” I started to notice something interesting, which was recurrently expressed by the interviewees, which was the often unspoken relation of “politics” and “affection.” Many of the interviewees directly equated politics with fear, they discussed political events in terms of pain, sadness or anxiety, and more distinctly some spoke of politics as “*being* about” love: “For democracy there must be love” told me Andrés Cruz Vázquez in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. This unique way of relating to the Political, a place where the “personal” *is* constituted by the “public” and vice versa, made me understand that in fact love *must* be a primary agent of politics, because love demonstrates sensibility and sensibility is the antidote to oppression and exclusion. When we feel for someone we take care of her or him, we respect she or he for what she or he is. Unfortunately the history of politics is an accumulation of insensibilities and of myopic blindness: We seem unable to see beyond our cultural norms, beyond our moral prejudice, beyond our territorialism or beyond our faith. I have come to think of antagonistic politics as the impossibility of seeing the person standing before you. The way that History, with a capital H, has been written proves these exclusions. The pages of History present a hegemonic world-view, the documents of history have been written from the perspective of the oppressor, and the books of knowledge reflect the enacting of that power. “The Good Life” was my first attempt to construct a counter narrative to those dominant discourses: It is an archive of subjective perceptions and opinions that would never be validated by “official” social-scientific sciences, precisely because it tries to de-centralize the dominant narrative by experimenting with different methodologies.

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When I turned eighteen years old, although I had already "come out" to my family and friends as a gay boy, I realized that I was absolutely ignorant about gay history. In fact, I didn't even know there was a history to be aware of. I went to gay bars and I knew some older gays and lesbians in Bogotá, but we were all marginal, we lived our lives underground, there was no sense of historical kinship or belonging. Up to that point I hadn't imagined that gays and lesbians had organized politically for their rights. I wasn't aware that I *could* in fact *be* gay beyond the bed. Homosexuality was never discussed in school in an academic setting, which made the bullying I was subject to, be justified in strangely confusing ways. Since I felt *different* and *differently* and there was no mention of that difference in the texts books or by mature adults, I was forced to search for my queer predecessors in the dark; I had become my own instructor; I had also become an artist.

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"People are not provoked by those who are different. What is more provoking is our insecurity: When you say, 'I am so sorry but I am different.' That's much more provoking than saying 'I am different,' or 'I have something to tell you, I can see something that you cannot see!'"

With these words, Norwegian Trans activist Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad situates sexual difference as a unique opportunity rather than as a social condemnation. "Difference" is a way of *being* in the world, and as such it represents a prospect of individual and collective empowerment, social and political enrichment, and freedom. Freedom implies the sovereignty to govern oneself: Being human is *being* beyond parameters, *being* without sex or gender constraints.

But, has this ideal been attained in the four decades of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer and Questioning politics?

With that question in mind I set out to work on "We Who Feel Differently," in order to discuss the notions of sexual difference, equality, citizenship and democracy in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, more than documenting the advancement of bills and laws that favor LGB and in cases T subjects, the project was conceived critically in response to the way that the international LGBT Movement has grown to encourage an assimilationist behavior, which I consider to be far from the ideas of gay liberation. "We Who Feel Differently" is thus is primarily concerned with two themes al large: First, recuperating a critical sense of community and constructing a queer "We," a community that resists being represented in "we are just like you" terms, values difference over sameness, and embraces difference as a critical opportunity to construct a socially just world. And second, documenting the work of LGBTQQ subjects that dedicate their lives to re-define the terms of LGBT inclusion into normative institutions in ways that defy assimilation.

"We Who Feel Differently" is composed of four parts: The first part is an online database documentary, which features Interviews with fifty queer academicians, activists, artists, radicals, researches, and others in Colombia, Norway, South Korea and the United States about the histories and development of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTIQQ) politics. I chose these countries because they would represent very different histories of political organization and cultural transformation regarding LGBT issues. The second part is an online Journal, which is a sporadic publication that presents in depth analyses and critiques of LGBTIQQ politics from queer angles. The first issue, titled "Queerly Yours: Thoughts and Afterthoughts on Marriage Equality," features commissioned articles by international activists that argue against the Movement's focus on marriage as the ultimate step toward equality. The third part is an installation that includes a social area, videos and

prints. The installation was conceived as a platform to hold events, talks, performances and other public gatherings relevant to the local community. We have held a series of events organized by local activists and artists in the different cities where the project has been presented.

The last part of the project is a Book, co-edited with Cristina Motta, my sister, which outlines five thematic threads drawn from the interviews in the form of a narrative. Contrary to the online database, which features the interviews in their entirety, the book is composed of excerpts of the interviews divided by what, we, as editors considered were five recurring and urgent themes. We recognized the need for a concise document that would address these nuanced points. I will move onward to briefly explain four of the five themes, introducing political and discursive concepts:

1- The Equality Framework: The last four decades have been productive in regard to LGBT rights activism and legal politics. Numerous countries in the Global North have improved the status of their LGBT citizens: Homosexuality has been de-criminalized, anti-discrimination bills have been implemented, and a heated debate on same-sex marriage has made gays and lesbians more visible. These changes, from a condition of absolute oppression to having a greater degree of social and political visibility, are partly the result of decades of grass roots community organizing and activism, institutional lobbying and political advocacy. Many LGBT people have endorsed these achievements but, at the same time, they have been largely censured. Critics coming from within the legal field have judged that liberal reforms are unable to provide substantive equality. Queer critics, external to the legal sphere, have viewed these reforms as an extension of privileges to those who benefit from traditional hierarchies, such as those of class, ethnicity, gender, or race; or as conforming to heterosexual norms. The ideal of equal treatment under the law is at the heart of these changes. Equality establishes that all people should be treated equally under the law, and if they are “different,” they should have the equal right to be considered in terms of their differences. This principle works under the constraints derived from formal

equality and state neutrality regarding moral debates and theories of the good life.

But while the "equality framework" has encouraged most of the legal victories for LGBT rights in various countries, it has also produced distinctive dilemmas. One of them refers to the alleged moral neutrality that informs formal equality. The demand for neutrality, that is, the demand that the State remain impartial before the debate on what is the good life, without attempting to impose criteria concerning the social morality on an individual's conduct, is a key principle of liberalism. This principle leads to reforms based on the idea of tolerance, but decisions and policies made in the name of tolerance have proven to be ineffective in terms of guaranteeing respect for the activities they intend to protect.

The international LGBT Movement, which largely finds its roots in the United States, commonly bases its strategy in foregrounding identity politics, to inform legal debates. For queer theorists and activists, "identity politics" tend to *essentialize* homosexuality, to reify identity categories, and to assimilate the subjects it has created. The focus is on identity affirmation versus, say a celebration of difference, a term that has been relegated by the tactical use of the term "equality." The way that identity is presented to heterosexual society tends to be almost apologetic: "We are just like you, except we like people of our same sex, but we want to live like you, marry like you, have 'respectable' family values, be monogamous, think and act like you…" This strategy alienates those of *us* that consciously live our lives resisting the forces of heteronormative oppression. They need to "stop begging for tolerance," told me Norwegian academician Tone Hellesund, referring to the gay and lesbian Movement in her country.

A perfect example of this drive towards assimilation is the marriage equality debate, which has taken front center stage internationally. This assimilationist character of same-sex marriage is condemned by queer activists and theorists and clashes with the emancipatory consequences granted to this legislation by rights activists, who see in this law the definite step to gain full

citizenship and equality. To illustrate this point I will quote below four activists that expose the nuances of the debate. Colombian theorist María Mercedes Gómez offers an interesting perspective regarding the practical consequences of political stances when she says: "(…) It is much easier to say that one does not agree with gay marriage because it repeats the traditional pattern if one does not need health insurance, or protecting one's children, or a residency visa. I always take into account what the scope of my political stance is at every moment, and what I can do to make sure that my political stance does not repeat or generate a form of injustice. Marriage generates a series of individual rights that are valid and necessary for people who do not have other privileges, and in that sense I think the option must exist. The consequence may be that instead of undergoing a radical transformation, society will move along lines that will continue to be unfair for many: for example, having access to certain individual rights only through marriage. But since the space for radical transformation does not seem to be a possibility in the short term, I think that one must work strategically so that the people who want and need this right may exercise it."

Colombian lawyer Esteban Restrepo approaches the debate from a different angle when he affirms, "The monogamous dynamics will turn against the LGBT community: Before, they did not allow us to get married; now the ideal thing is to be married. (…) The other issue is that the fact that same sex couples are allowed to get married and may adopt children does not imply that homophobia is over, because homophobia exists in people's minds; homophobia is a prejudice, and prejudices are lodged in a very complex way in people's minds, in educational processes, in processes of basic socialization, at school, at home. To transform this, the Law has a minimal potential; it may raise the issue, it may show a hidden social phenomenon, it may normalize it in the sense that it begins to refer to the situation of many persons as an issue of political concern, it may lead to self-questionings, but transformations are always followed – and this has been shown in the context of the United States – by a homophobic backlash. The homophobic forces within society resist. This occurs in every sphere: When in

1954 the United States Supreme Court prohibited racial segregation in schools, George Wallace, the governor of Alabama said: 'I won't comply, I simply won't comply; here our cultural life is based on the separation of white and black persons, the United States Supreme Court of Justice cannot come and tell me that I have to accept blacks in my children's school; I'm not going to do it.' Why wouldn't the same thing happen in an issue, homosexuality, which is linked to one of the greatest anxieties in Western culture?"

Ryan Conrad, American queer activist and founding member of the collective *Against Equality* delivers a " (…) a materialist class critique to actually talk about marriage, to wipe away this gloss of affect that portrays marriage as being about love and family, when it is actually a social contract between two people and the state and the transfers of property, power and money between them. I think it is really hard for people to step back from this sheen that has been put over marriage. Gay and lesbian activists have been digging up this rhetoric of affect and love, questioning how love can be outlawed, and it is actually not what everyone is talking about but a distraction from actually talking about how sexual identity decides whether people live or die, have access to healthcare or not, can move across boarders, and access jobs. People aren't talking about that piece. The class critique is huge for me and comes from an urban/rural critique as well. Not to suggest that there aren't poor people in urban settings, but in Maine in particular rural equals poverty. For me there is always a critique of urban gays with more money than the rest of us setting the agenda while people outside of major urban centers don't have access to any resources and are most at risk for poverty and HIV. It is pretty ridiculous how urban-centric the conversation has become, something which is part of the class critique as well."

And lastly Norwegian theorist Arnfinn Andersen thinks, "Sexuality shouldn't be a way to prioritize people's lives. (…) A better way of organizing this would be based on the needs that people have when sharing a household. We have family relationships that are more complex, but we are supporting only one

type of structure: Marriage. Should we replicate the heterosexual model?"

Personally, I think LGBTQQ communities need to continue a sustained debate around the primacy of marriage within the Movement's agenda. Marriage not only prioritizes the needs of a select, class-based portion of the population, but it is also a disproportionate way to spend the economic resources of national gay and lesbian organizations, which invest large sums of their budgets on marriage equality campaigns, while LGBT homelessness and poverty for example remain low in the agenda. The mainstream LGBT Movement has been absorbed the *status quo*; gay activists have turned into career bureaucrats and are very far away from the ideal of gay liberation they like to say they promote.

2- Defying Assimilation: The emphasis on marriage also displaces a debate around "affective difference," which I believe is was one of the accomplishments of the gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which in the words on Edmund White, "looked down on monogamy and I think the gay leaders of the 1970s would be appalled to see how many gays now want to be married and monogamous. Pre-AIDS, the idea was to be free, overthrow the heterosexual model, and try to invent something new. Part of that was to separate out the various functions that accumulated in a relationship with one person in heterosexual companionate marriage that, we thought, did not work. It was ending in divorce; it was a disaster. (…) We thought you should have 'tricks' for one night stand for sex, 'fuck buddies' you would see on a regular basis for sex, a 'lover' who might be somebody you would live and have a physical relationship with or sleep in the same bed and kiss, but maybe not have sex or just occasionally, etc. I think a lot of gay life is still being lived this way, but I think gays have become so prudish that they do not like to admit it anymore."

"Affective difference" is not only about an expanded experience of one's sexuality, it is also a way of living one's life against oppressive institutions, and societal restrictions based on a normative morality, which intends to over-determine they way we are supposed to behave in society. "Affective difference" is

the assertion of a "critical difference," which may empower us to act politically in solidarity with other marginalized groups and minorities. The queer left identifies racism, classism, militarism, and capitalism as being validated and legitimated by the Movement in its attempt to conquer equality on its own terms. Isn't a queer agenda a suitable place to build an activism and politics of solidarity?

American activist Ryan Conrad refers to this matter in his description of the scope of the work of *Against Equality*: "(…) We are actually suggesting the idea of equality in the *status quo* and the systems and institutions that already exist were designed for a hetero-supremacist society that is classist and racist. Maybe we should be investing our energy into transformative ways of meeting our material and affective needs, dealing with harm and violence in our community and addressing whatever the ideas of nationhood and national security are."(…) When we talk about equality we are talking about this idea that we need to have equal stake in these hugely problematic, and I would say, deadly institutions. We are against that. Some people at events we have done say we are not *against* equality but for *real* equality, or against this sham of equality. I guess if that is how you need to frame it for yourself to get what we are saying, then that is right, we are for *radical equity*. We are talking about economic justice and social justice on a broad scale and not just single-issue identity politics that none of us feel invested in."

Activist and former director of Queers for Economic Justice Kenyon Farrow, offers a useful breakdown of his opposition to the four-pillar mainstream issues prioritized by the U.S. LGBT Movement including: Marriage equality, 'Don't Ask Don't Tell,' hate crimes inclusion, and the 'Employee Non-Discrimination Act.' (…) We are opposed to dropping the ban on gays in the military and advocating for gay inclusion in the military because of the impact of the military industrial complex on the U.S. budgets, where about half of the U.S. budget comes down to military spending, and can be cut from major portions of how much money is available to help people with health care and a range of other needs. We are also opposed to what the military and U.S. war machine does in

other countries. Supporting human rights of gays and lesbians in the U.S. does not make any sense alongside being able and kill, maim, and destroy gays and lesbians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the many places where the U.S. is doing all kinds of imperialist military operations. This is similar to our position toward hate crime legislation in terms of expanding the prison system in the U.S., which is already the largest the world has ever seen in human civilization and primarily impacts people of color, including queer people who were locked up. The 'Employee Non-Discrimination Act,' finally, is not a real plan towards economic justice. It is not talking about livable wages or economic sustainability; it is merely a plan for working people to figure out some legal system for filing discrimination cases. We see, in terms of race, religion, or gender that discrimination cases are actually quite difficult to win and we are opposed to the mainstream movement."

Surrendering to the *status quo* has limited the scope of social justice of the movement, yet activists around the world have dedicated their time and resources to build networks of solidarity and action to construct agendas designed by and for marginalized people. Decentralizing power by speaking from "the margins" to "the margins" is a way of tackling the Movement's failures, but more importantly, of meeting the urgent needs of underrepresented communities. I would like to re-emphasize that the shift from "identity politics" to "queer politics" is an opportunity to think beyond personal identities to build an "activism of solidarity."

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3- The implicit endorsement of a binary organization of gender and sexuality as well as the assimilationist effect attached to it, are not the only (un)intended consequences of the identity-based approach. An even more problematic corollary is produced: The construction of identities implies an explicit rigidity in the categorization of gender. This, in turn, excludes not only those unable or reluctant to be categorized, but also a very marginalized segment of the population: Transgender and intersex people. Because I am don't identify

as trans or intersex myself, I will be mostly quoting from the interviewees statements, to allow them to represent themselves.

There is a first problem of definition and characterization. Justus Eisfeld, trans activist and Co-Director of *Global Action of Trans*Equality* (GATE) affirms, "(…) I don't think anybody can define a trans person in a clearly defined setting. We prefer to work on gender identity issues and gender identity rights that are broadly rooted in critical gender studies and feminism. We consider these foundations from perspectives of people who transgress gender norms because we have found that perpetrators of violence, for example, don't really care how people self identify, but rather attack anybody who they perceive as transgressing gender norms. This can be a person who is visibly transgendered or androgynous, but it can also be a person who crosses gender boundaries in other ways, for example, gay men with a sway in their hips, lesbian women who look a little too butch, heterosexual women in a powerful position, and so on. While these are all transgressions of gender norms, many of these people would never self-identify as trans and we would never claim for them to be trans. While we are deeply rooted within the trans movement we also feel we need to take multiple needs into account when pressing for trans rights in order to frame our struggle in a broader spectrum addressing the transgression of gender norms as well as looking critically at gender norms in general."

Regarding the needs of trans people, he thinks "(…) they are similar in most parts of the world. There are always issues around holistic recognition of our gender identities, both in legal terms but also in medical terms. There are always issues around violence, discrimination, harassment, and accessing employment, work and healthcare. However, the severity of these issues varies greatly from country to country and from culture to culture. In some places access to healthcare is more important and in other places direct violence by strangers or by family members is a more direct need so the emphasis is different in different parts of the world."

There are many varieties between male and female, Justus Eisfeld asserts. “I personally believe we should question why states and governments register gender in the first place. Any registration of any characteristic is always used to make distinctions between people and I believe governments should not make distinctions between men and women. (…) Registration of men and women by governments has always been very closely linked to being able to draft one half of society to be part of the military. (…) Registering men and women can be useful in terms of monitoring discrimination, knowing how many men and how many women are in specific places in society, but I firmly believe this can be done with statistical methods as well, without coming down to the individual person.”

Classifications constraint flexibility and restrict ambiguity. They exclude the very essence of lives such as American performer Mx. Justin Vivian Bond’s, who, throughout v’s life, has been “(…) gender fluid and sometimes identified as more male or more female, (…) when I was younger (…) I didn’t have a way out really. I have been very aggressive about saying I am trans in work and in life, but other than my work, people can take nothing other than my word for this expression.”

“(…) Generally speaking, whenever society privileges its way of understanding the world, its norms, its classifications of human beings, we all lose.” says Colombian intersex activist Joshua Pimiento Montoya. “(…) That family lost a valuable member; society, his society, lost a being who had a place, who should have had a place. Defending tooth and nail any classification system imposed upon human beings is already a problem. Why not let us be, why not let us be happy? If a person living a particular experience finds more meaning to his/her life and may simply be, the rest will also be happier and will be in greater harmony; it is a global benefit. But to stop classifying is very complicated, culture has that vocation; it classifies us, it organizes us. (…) Whoever feels that this *is* his essence (…); let him do *so*. What is the urgency to put pressure on him, to shape him in a certain way and not let him be?”

Colombian trans activist Diana Navarro vindicates self-definition. “(…) We depend on self-definition, on self-determination, on the person’s self-construction. If you come with a beard and a mustache, wearing a suit and you tell me you are a trans person, (…) you are a trans person. Many of us express our gender in vehement ways, but others prefer to consider themselves, construct themselves, act in a certain way, but have a contrary gender”.

Endorsing this statement in favor of gender flexibility and moving ahead in an attempt to *use* language positively to name and understand non-normative sexualities, Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad creates new categories: “(…) Language is our main way of communicating as human beings. We can’t get rid of categories so I believe in them. Humans will categorize however hard we try not to and I want to be in a dialogue with the existing terms. If I tried to introduce and to construct a totally different language that I would find more appropriate, I wouldn’t be able to communicate. I believe in changing things a little more gradually. I am sure you have heard me use the word ‘talent.’ I talk about trans talents, ‘Androgen Insensitivity Talent,’ ‘Intersex Talent,’ etc., because in that way I am opposing medicalizing terms like ‘syndrome,’ ‘misshape,’ and others that aren’t very good as labels. For example, I also use the word ‘phenomenon.’ I think it is much better for a human being to be a phenomenon than to be a kind of walking disease or walking misfortune. In that way I try to add to the language words that are much more positive. ‘Talent’ is a positive word. My talent for being trans is a very strong one. When I tried to suppress it, it made me quite depressed. I think that is true for all strong talents: I am sure that if one had tried to stop Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart from making music, he would have become depressed because he would have felt that he had something in there that wanted to come out! He could hear it in his head and he wanted us to hear it too!”

Esben Esther believes “(…) the general public knows very little about trans ‘talents.’ I too was as ignorant as anybody back then. I had to search for information on transsexuality in books and encyclopedias, and wherever I read, it said I was a sick person. Honestly, I didn’t feel very sick, I didn’t even run a fever!

I thought these books were wrong. Their ideas were burdening me with a diagnosis that was unnecessary. A diagnosis that made something that is precious to me into something that is ill and wrong. This sparked the necessity for me to be political and to open up space to the 'unusual' human being: You are not sick, you are not disturbed but you certainly do disturb. My work today entails being a therapist to individuals and to couples but I am also trying to assist those that are disturbed by me. Instead of accepting the label 'disturbing,' I like to assist those I disturb. I disturb psychiatry, I disturb psychology; I disturb a lot of people. My wife and I have a favorite lecture we give called 'Gender Euphoria,' in which we quote Marcel Proust: '(…) The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes…'"

In a strong assertion against the gender binary, Esben Esther declares that "(…) there is a struggle between those who believe in a more fluid way of perceiving gender, those who believe that there are far more genders than two. We operate with seven and if you propose an eighth one it will be welcomed. The seven genders are based on people we have actually met. They do not represent an ethereal map that we want to impose. The first is what we call the 'Female Genders,' and we put them in plural to indicate that there are many colors within that category as well. Then the 'Male Genders.' Then the 'Inter Genders,' or the 'Intersex Genders,' which are also a group that has been made ill. Here we have the 'Klinefelter Phenomenon,' the 'Turner Phenomenon' and the 'Androgen Insensitivity Phenomenon.' Note that in medical terms these are called 'syndromes,' but for me they are 'phenomenons.' (…) Then you have the 'Trans Genders,' where I belong, which is also another rainbow of people, of ways to express oneself. There are several ways to more or less change your body to make it a good 'place' to be. Then there are people who refuse gender, you could call them 'Gender Refuters.' They say gender is not for them. Those I have met have been very political about their position. Then you have the 'Personal Genders.' I met someone I called Oscar who has long blond hair, beautiful make up, female clothes, a bulge and no breasts. I asked Oscar: 'What pronoun do you want me to use when I talk to and about you?' Oscar said: 'He.' So I asked him: 'What gender

are you Oscar, I am a little confused?' and he said: 'I am Oscar. I do gender *my way*. I don't want to be in any categories.' The seventh gender is the 'Eunuch Genders.' There are the *Hijras* or the *Khusras* of India who may or may not see themselves as belonging to that category. There is an organized group called 'Eunuch Genders,' which are somatic males that want to remove their testicles because they feel that those testicles aren't 'them.' Of course they are entitled to do that. I believe in self-determined gender."

The binary system to organize gender and sexuality not only reduces the scope of individual vital experiences; it also establishes a scheme of social exclusion and discrimination with deep consequences. A significant one is the absence of medical access for those who intend to receive hormonal or chirurgical treatment. Discrimination and exclusion are present always throughout the State's actions. Even if the fundamental right to autonomy is protected, the power to be oneself has drastic limitations, as Diana Navarro explains. "(…) We have no access to health, we have no services with a differential perspective that renders them adequate for our specificities and our needs; we don't have that. I was telling a senator: What the hell do I care about a right to the free development of personality if I have no access to medical care, I cannot transform my body to adapt it and be faithful to the feminine or masculine ideal I aspire to, which is not a simple whim, which is not a simple invention, it is a need of mine, and a need that requires a psychological, medical, interdisciplinary accompaniment. How am I going to develop my personality freely if I don't have the right to health, if I don't have the right to work because I dress like a woman being a man. How am I going to have the right to the free development of my personality if I do not have access to decent housing?"

These limits begin with the very first obligation of the state to give citizens an ID number. As Ruin makes it clear, this is a major concern, because it is the condition to be entitled to all other rights. "(…) The biggest issue is the Resident Registration Number (The 13-digit national identification number system of Korea. The first six digits consist of the resident's birth date, in the form of

YYMMDD, and the first of the latter seven digits indicates the resident's sex; an odd number if a man, an even number if a woman). The RRN is almost a prerequisite for a proper life in Korea. They ask for it on all sorts of occasions. For transgender persons, the sex indicated on the RRN and the apparent or identified sex is discordant, and therefore they are looked at suspiciously. The RRN is also required when you look for a job, so transgender people are often unemployed or work temporary jobs. Some transgender persons look almost 20 years younger due to their hormone treatments and they are more than often asked for their RRN cards at bars and even when buying cigarettes. Sometimes they are even suspected of carrying someone else's card."

Mx. Justin Vivian Bond celebrates the fact that "(…) they just changed the law, I think in New York or maybe in the Federal Government, that you no longer have to have surgery in order to get gender confirmed by a doctor, which makes it easier for people to have their gender changed on their passports. Once your gender is changed on your passport it becomes easier in smaller, more local ways to get your gender changed. Of course the gender choices on a passport are still 'M' and 'F.' If I write male or female, either one, I am lying, because I am neither. I would like to see a 'T' in the box, or a 'T' and circle. Let the other two be boxes!"

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The biological condition of an individual whose sexuality is divided between male and female characteristics is called intersexuality. The medicalization of this condition, its treatment as pathology, and the poor medical ethics concerning the treatment of the infants are urgent issues for intersex activists internationally. Also, the moral admissibility of intrusive medical practices, the scope of certain definitions, the relations between intersexuality and sexual orientation, and between intersex and transgender people are the main subjects addressed throughout these interviews.

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore offers a definition of intersexuality in the following terms: "(…) What we call intersex people are children that are born

somewhere between male and female. The resting state of mammal tissue is female, so once a child is conceived, if nothing were to happen to that fetus, it would be born with genitalia that looks female and that doesn't matter from the standpoint of the chromosomes or anything else. What matters are the hormonal effects on the child. As it develops, the child moves basically from female to male in many steps and the genitals literally change how they look and function over the time of gestation. If there is a stopping in that masculinization, especially the external genitalia, then that child is noticed often at birth as being between the sexes or having ambiguous genitalia."

"(…) What happens to them socially and physically?" asks Norwegian researcher Marit Vaula Rasmussen. "How do the medical system, the state administration and the law, deal with these conditions? Usually intersex children are given an assigned gender pretty early, and then they are treated either with hormones or with surgery, or both, at a rather early time in their lives. I chose to define intersex in a way that also includes other larger out-groups that are often not thought of as intersex, like individuals that have Turner Syndrome and Klinefelter's Syndrome."

Perhaps the most vital question about intersexuality is its conception as a pathology that needs medical intervention. Joshua Pimiento Montoya, considers that "(…) there are some medical aspects, but they are minimal. One of those cases is the syndrome termed Suprarenal Hyperplasia, because if it affects the body's electrolytes, the person may suffer dehydration. But I think this occurs in a minor proportion. What we are talking about here is how medicine has somehow vested itself with an authority to define who is who in many senses, but based on the body, on the materiality of this body. Since it is the authority regarding the knowledge of that body, it is supposed to be the one in charge of defining, but in the framework of a system that only recognizes two possibilities, not just in terms of sex but also of identity. If you are a man you must have a penis of a certain size and oriented towards penetration, and if you are a woman, you must have a vagina that may be penetrated."

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore endorses affirms: "(…) There are a few medically necessary considerations around kids who are born with hormonal imbalance that causes them to waste all the salt out of their system. They would die rapidly if they didn't get hormonal intervention. That is one type. Almost all the rest of the intersex kids that we force changes on, it is all cosmetic and not one doctor is going to tell you it is medically necessary, except for the discomfort of the parents for how the kid is going to be accepted into society. The idea is to fix this kid up so they look 'right,' but medical considerations from the standpoint of just the health of the child, there are only a few very specific considerations that we can find out pretty quick and treat relatively easily. All the rest of it is about how we think these kids are supposed to look so that everybody else is comfortable."

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore thinks of early medical intervention as a mutilation equivalent to female circumcision; he denounces "(…) the hypocrisy of the female circumcision condemnation, which came out in Congress and we wanted to question why in a discussion about genital surgery on kids Congress would be willing to end this surgery for Muslim kids in Saudi Arabia, but not for American kids in every American city in this country, we ran into a debate about religious traditions behind circumcision and were told Congress couldn't issue a blanket statement making it illegal to do genital surgery on infants without their consent because 'what do we do about circumcision?' For me, the answer isn't that hard, circumcision continues in the way it has been done for thousands and thousands of years, by somebody who is part of that religious organization. Every doctor in every hospital doesn't circumcise every male child that is born, it is easy, but they make it hard."

When asked whether waiting would be the best option for a child to decide for itself what to do with its body, Devore said: "(…) This is what all of us who are born intersex are trying to get the medical establishment to do, to wait, to let the child make a determination about what their sex of identity is so that when they are three, four or five, they begin to tell you if they think they are a boy or girl and

they show you by the kinds of ways that they pick toys, how they refer to themselves, or by the clothing they prefer. By the time they are eleven, twelve, thirteen, they make a decision about what kind of puberty they want to have. Do they want to have a feminizing puberty and end up looking like a girl, do they want to have a masculinizing puberty and end up looking like a boy or do they want something else? Do they want to have a puberty that is natural to their own personal physiology go with that? There are some kids who will identify as being neither male nor female and that is very difficult for parents and heterosexual people because they want their kid to be heterosexual too. They want their kid to be either male or female, to grow up like they did and to find an opposite sex partner, have children, a family and to have that kind of life, but that doesn't always fit for an intersex person."

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Because of time limitations I will move on to the next project, but I invite you to either visit "We Who Feel Differently" online or to read the book, which is available fro free in PDF form.

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The second project I want to talk about is a collaborative project with New York based PhD student in Performance Studies, Joshua Lubin-Levy titled "Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public," which was just published this month. The book assembles drawings from memory of spaces in New York City where a public sexual encounter occurred. It features contributions from an intergenerational group of over 60 gay men. Conceived as an atlas of queer affection, "*Petite Mort"* proposes a subjective blueprint of the city, one that values not simply the space "as is," but how it has been performed and engaged, highlighting the fundamental connection between public space and queer life. The collected drawings, depicting sites extending from a residential rooftop to The Rambles in Central Park, remind us that public sex is not exclusively about a personal pursuit of pleasure—they also contain the seeds of historical social and political action that have brought together communities of gay men. *Petite Mort*

also asks questions challenging us to expand our vision for queer politics: What if our politics were rebuilt around a broader notion of intimacy rather than individuality? Can we foster, rather than police, the trust and affection inherent to desire and pleasure? Should equality be about difference, rather than assimilation?

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It is hard to imagine how teenagers today, for example, would connect, meet and create a sense of belonging without the Internet. I think I belong to the last generation of teenagers that had to cruise for sex out on the streets. Thinking about how I experience the lack of that kind of physical contact as a personal and a social loss, made me think it was urgent to do a project about the disappearance of these public sex sites. For me, *Petite Mort* addresses the way that this disappearance has been an active "cleanup campaign" driven by the city government and encouraged by LGBT bureaucrats that are busy cleaning the image of the "promiscuous gay" that doesn't conform to a normative model of identity expression. *Petite Mort* also discusses how these campaigns relate to the privatization of public space in general by the forces of neoliberal economic politics. And lastly, it discusses how cruising grounds, public toilets, dark alleys, etc. have been fundamental to the forming of communities within gay history in New York City, and how these places were sites of emotional and sexual relations, even if they were ephemeral and conditioned by social stigmas.

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Gays in the 1970s thought of sex as a symbol of liberation and I would like to think that *Petite Mort* in its own way, does the same. After the teachings of the sexual liberation movement, sex has been reduced again to something that has to take place within the confines of a relationship, between two married people in the privacy of their own home. I would like to see *Petite Mort* suggest that sex needs to be taken out of the bedroom, and to re-politicize it within the current conservative climate that believes all queer people want to assimilate to

heteronormative society. The forces of the LGBT movement are very strong: They have prioritized a set of issues that fail to address the fallacies of the larger political system. Instead of fighting to modify that system, gay bureaucrats have embraced the "we are just like you" mentality that queer liberationists had so strongly fought against. Why would any queer person want to join the Army, a lethal institution that propagates a patriarchal, imperialist, and destructive logic of exclusion? Why not organize against it and use our resources to abolish it? Why the need to marry? Why not demand equal access to rights by demanding the transformation of the legal system? I resist the response that these questions are utopian because they are in fact an opportunity to rethink our political goals, to rethink and enact a queer agenda.

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Petite Mort approaches these larger political questions by focusing on the way that city policies have transformed public space and consequently imposed the formation of private models for sexual contact. Because we have witnessed this transformation happen right in front of our eyes, this project is an attempt to document the history that is left behind, not scientifically but subjectively. The collected drawings revisit that lost city that will never be again.

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It is also important to address the fact that public sex has often been associated with disease. Since the advent of the AIDS crisis, which prompted the closing of all gay bathhouses in New York City, the idea of public sex has been represented as and associated with a "promiscuous" behavior performed by desperate people. There is a moral shadow over the idea of public sex because it is associated with the very tired notion of promiscuity. In the face of an epidemic I understand how shutting down venues that facilitated "high risk" behavior may have seemed urgent, but what did we learn from the work of activists like Douglas Crimp or Simon Watney who denounced and resisted the misrepresentation of gay promiscuity during the crisis and provided alternative models to think about this?

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I would like to finish by adding that *Petite Mort* is an attempt to construct a document of a particular history that concerns gay men, apart from any focus on identity politics or the politics of exclusion. I think this is a queer initiative; event though gay men might be privileged in certain sectors, we have also been targets of discrimination and exclusion precisely for enacting our sexuality and desire in public. I am interested in the way we thought of *Petite Mort* as a documentary project but insisted on "documenting" from a very subjective perspective. The decision to ask gay men to submit drawings "from memory" of public sites where they had sex rather than actually requesting photographs from them, is to me a way of thinking about the document in a more fluid way, more along the lines of an oral history. We wanted to resist providing a totalizing narrative, and the drawings from memory really refuse it: It becomes about the experience of space through pleasure/desire, a different temporal space, and not in the accurate way that it exists to be remembered. I think of this approach as a very special form of documentary.

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Thank you, I would gladly respond any questions now

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Excerpts from this text were co-authored with Cristina Motta